

# DIAMOND DICK JR.

THE BOYS BEST WEEKLY

Issued Weekly—By Subscription, \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office by STREET & SMITH.

No. 121.

Price Five Cents.

## DIAMOND DICK'S DOUBLE. OR THE CRYSTAL CHIP OF GUNNISON.



THE WEAPON FLEW OUT OF HIS HAND, BROKEN AT THE BUTT BY THE GIRL'S LIGHTNING SNAP SHOT.



# Diamond Dick, Jr.

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# Diamond Dick's Double

OR,

## The Crystal Chip of Gunnison

By W. B. LAWSON

### CHAPTER I.

#### BANISHED BY THE VIGILANTES.

Fifteen leagues to the westward, and a few miles south of the center of Colorado, lies the famous gold-veined, silver-ribbed country of the Gunnison.

As wild as a savage in his sun dance is the whole region, and rough in its ragged ranges of rocky peaks.

Jungles of thick underbrush—the lair of fierce wild animals, mottes of trees and huge forests, black with shadows and brush, were scattered among these rocky ridges.

And this is the country in which our story is laid; a portion of land as rough as Nature ever turned from her restless hands.

But rougher more than nature made it was it rendered by the crimes and evil actions of its inhabitants.

The discovery of rich gold deposits, immense lodes of silver, and stratum of metals less valuable, among these mountains, had flashed over the world on the lightning's wing, and from near and far, from every quarter, a mass of reckless humanity flocked into this almost unknown and unexplored region.

In a short space of time stamp-mills and smelting works were erected, and roads, so-called, were outlined over all the rugged country.

Mining camps sprang up like mushrooms in a night, towns sprouted out like spring blossoms, and a few budded and ripened into cities.

Prominent among these was the Gunnison City; it rose from a few hovels into the veritable metropolis of the country, and became the central point to head for, previous to starting out for the districts teeming with gold or silver.

At the time of which I write Gunnison City was overrun with gamblers, audacious bullies and villains, whose reckless scorn of anything pertaining to law, vile deeds, and terrible pursuits at last aroused the anger of the honest, worthy residents of the town.

As in similar frontier settlements, a vigilance committee was organized, and before the ruffians, bummers and crime-stained desperadoes knew of their danger, they were in the grip of the vigilantes—alive, if they surrendered quietly, or shot down if they resisted capture.

Some of the very worst of these villains



were hung; others, of lower grade, were escorted out of town and warned to remain out; and others still, about whom hung a suspicion of evil doings, were ordered to leave the city within a prescribed time.

An act of such a nature was taking place on the outskirts of the city; and as the characters are of interest in the action of this narrative, we will follow them in their adventures.

A detachment of the vigilantes were gathered about one individual, and the leader of the border policemen remarked laconically:

"Ye've had yer notice, square—ye've bin told to vamoose the town in ha'f an hour, an' we wonter see ye git."

The man to whom these words were addressed answered, promptly:

"Git! you bet; I'm a-goin' outer here so derned quick, thet ye'll hev ter look moughty sharp ter see me in ther smoke."

"We'll be lookin' right peart, ye kin buck on that."

"I ketch holt, cap'n! mebbe ye will see me—a little; cause I can't do as well's I uster—I've got rusty ramblin' in this here burro, lop-sided town frum way down—why, ye ain't got life enough here to tickle the heels of a mule."

"Then scoot fur a grave-yard thet'll suit ye more on the ante; an' 'f ye hear me, do it quick!" the vigilante remarked, grimly.

"Cap'n, yer voice breaks on me ear like the whispers of a sow stuck in a cross-bar fence," the outcast individual retorted, coolly.

"It ain't offen as Diamond Dick gits ther interest of a city guver'ment throwed on him, but ye air twenty an' I'm playing a lone hand. You calls me an' I show up, ther pot is yours, pard, I ain't no hog, an' I knows when I've got enough.

"But I wish ter remark, cap'n," he continued, as the vigilante leader made no reply, "f it ain't too fur out of yer memory, will ye give me ther information fur why I am ambulated outer the city?"

"We wa'n't formed ter answer questions, but ter give orders—ay, an' see them follered out," the vigilante observed, coldly.

"I hear ye, cap'n—I ain't kickin' 'bout git-

tin'," the exiled individual answered, quickly; "thar's onny one thing as makes it bad."

"An' what's that?"

"I'm broke, busted 'way down under bed rock."

"Wal, we'll give ye a lift 'f ye want it so—with a rope," the vigilante said, significantly.

"Oh, no, cap'n! I wouldn't put ye to all thet trouble; I war onny ventilatin' ther state of my bank account. I ain't hankerin' arter what I ain't used to. See?" And a low laugh broke from his lips as he finished speaking.

A remarkable looking man was this fellow, who seemed to have fallen into such evil fortunes with the newly self-appointed regulators.

He was fully six feet tall, straight as an arrow, superbly powerful of development, and darkly, though pallidly handsome, with a silky mustache and long curling locks, black as the raven's wing, and piercing black eyes.

There was also that in his free, commanding air, suggestive of much more culture than was betrayed by his manner of speech, which might therefore be more or less assumed for the occasion, though this would not have been suspected by the rough, rude men by whom he was now surrounded—cornered on the prairie edge of the town, as you might say.

As for attire, he was rather uncouthly enveloped, as he had been, in fact, during his lurking, rather suspicious stay in the neighborhood for a number of days past, from neck to heels in a voluminous, not over clean traveling duster, while even his felt sombrero was rendered hideous by a brown flimsy scarf wound around its crown in numerous folds.

"See here, stranger," said the vigilante chief, impatiently, "don't give us no more slush an' rot about your bein' the celebrated Diamond Dick, but jest say whether you're goin' ter git or not."

"Time enough fur that, pard," responded the suspected party, good-humoredly. "But why shouldn't I be Diamond Dick, pray?"

"Oh, give us a rest," interrupted a dozen voices in chorus. "Wall, whar's your diamonds, then?"



The stranger hesitated.

"I did intend to conceal my identity sum-wat, boys," he replied, half as if speaking to himself. "However," with a laugh, "here goes!"

With a swift, graceful movement, he flung aside his muffling robe, cast the scarf from off his hat, and stood before them somewhat agreeably, not to say magnificently, transformed.

Clad in admirably fitting black velvet, cut in the Mexican ranchero style, every button of his costume was the metallic setting for a real diamond of no mean value, while a brilliant loop, or buckle, studded with the same precious stones, adorned the band of his now elegant-appearing sombrero.

Furthermore, his shapely feet and legs were incased in high boots of richly dressed leather, while his belt was well supplied with cartridges, and a trusty revolver reposed in its half-sheath, or holster, on either hip.

"Gosh all hemlock!" cried a voice from the crowd, amid various other remarks, "but you air a daisy, an' no mistake, stranger."

"Mebbe it ain't Diamond Dick at all!" shouted another. "P'raps it's that imitation Diamond Dick up in the Saddle Range, what goes by the name of Crystal Chip, an' is suspicioned of headin' the road agents there on the sly."

The eyes of Diamond Dick, for it was, indeed, the famous far West adventurer of that name, flashed with indignant fire.

"You thar," he shouted, in a white wrath, "don't couple me with that scoundrel agin, or," he laid his hand menacingly on his pistols, "wall, you an' I may quar'l, that's all. Oh, yes," regaining his composure, "I'm not kickin' agin bein' run out of your town in this way, 'f I must be, understan' thet, all on you; but don't add insult to injury, 'f you please."

"Ef you're the real Simon pure Diamond Dick," called out another vigilante, "whar's the lightnin' little kid, the baby snap-shot Bertie, thet ained fame an' fortun' with ye down in Tombstone an' elsewhar? Say?"

Diamond Dick's brow again momentarily darkened.

"Thet's nuther here nor thar," he replied, with impatient gesture. "Ef the bright boy

hez—hez gone on over the Big Divide," fiercely, "what's thet to you?"

"Wall, ye hevn't been slow fillin' up his place, anyway," sneered yet another. "Only it's a gel now, the little Cactus Blossom, what's your pard; though she do seem," with a coarse laugh, "to hev gone back on ye in this snap, Diamond."

"Let be, I tell yer!" growled Diamond Dick, hoarsely. And then turning to the vigilante chief, he resumed. "Ez I said before, you're twenty to one, an' I ain't kickin' at this send off."

"Why don't ye cut your stick, then?" replied the man addressed, coldly. "For, whether you're the real or bogus Diamond Dick, we've got orders for you, an' you've got to git. You hear me!"

"Thet's all right—perhaps," nonchalantly. "But what's the particular squeal agin me? Can't ye say?"

"Loafin' and lurkin' round Gunnison, suspicious-like, ginerally. Thar ye be! Let thet content ye."

"In other words, strickly mindin' my own business. Thet's the complaint agin me, eh?"

"Air you goin' to git or not?" menacingly.

Diamond Dick was turning scornfully away when a light hand was suddenly laid upon his arm.

"Hold on, pard," a voice clear as a bell rang out; "don't you let no newly hatched, hairy-headed, ugly-mugged bipeds of the genus Lynch ring in a cold deck on you in this shape. If you want to stay among the luxurious palaces or gin-gutters of Gunnison City, just sling me a sly symptom of a wink, and I'll back ye up against all the vigilantes from here to Hades."

Diamond Dick looked into the face of the new arrival, seemingly a young girl of about sixteen years, her features fair and very beautiful, eyes big, brown, and flashing with indignation, lips and cheeks tinted like the rose, and a mass of yellow golden hair flowing from beneath the jaunty hat set upon her head.

She was dressed in dark-blue cloth, cut and made partly man fashion, the fringed edges of the coat reaching to her knees, her shape-



ly limbs and small feet incased in shining leather boots.

Her form was beautifully developed, her movements as lithe as those of a panther, and as graceful as a fawn in action.

A belt about her trim waist contained a brace of silver-mounted, self-acting revolvers, over which her hand hovered restlessly as she cast defiant glances upon the vigilantes.

Diamond Dick smiled as he looked upon the fair features of the young girl, but he shook his head gravely at her bold remarks.

"It won't do, little 'un, ter buck agin these fellers; they air onny ther cropin's of ther lode, so ter speak. Ye mean well, I know, but I want ter git out o' here."

"That's square as a tea-box, pard, but what have you done to make these ground hogs-kick ye out?"

"I give it up, Blossom; ask me some easy ones fust."

"That's what I thought!" the girl said, quickly. "You ain't done nothing worse than these virtuous vigilantes do every hour of the day; but as sure's my name is Cactus Blossom, I'd use my salivating cylinders on these jackass rabbits before I left the shadows of these classic structures called Gunnison; you can bet the gold filling in your teeth on that!"

And the hands on the revolvers, the flash in the eyes of the fair-faced girl, indicated that she meant every word she uttered to convey its full meaning.

Cactus Blossom was a likewise comparatively new arrival in the city, but her bonny form and bright face had instantly attracted the eyes of many an evil-hearted scoundrel, and more than one bold, atrocious attempt had been made to gain her favor.

But the fearless expression in her eyes, the sudden, deadly way in which she handled her revolvers, soon warned the ruffians to be more cautious in their designs.

Diamond Dick had at one time, it seemed, rescued her from a vile plot, and ever since she had called him "pard" and take a peculiar interest in the romantic and pale-faced adventurer.

But her last taunting observations had

aroused the resentment of the vigilante leader.

"Look a-here, me Cactus Blossom," he said, sternly, "this ain't none o' your funeral, an' ye needn't be slingin' yer tork around like dirt from a shovel. We ain't afeard of ther dynamite destructors in yer belt, an' I reckon when we git down to pay rock, ther wurst weepoon ye've got air ther rattle-weed 'tween yer teeth."

Cactus Blossom laughed mockingly.

"My! how you are improving, Jack Barr," she retorted, sarcastically. "You're getting as sharp as a mummy's teeth. All you want now is to corral some of the records of ancient Egypt, get a pair of shears and a glue pot, and start in as funny editor of some humorous paper—heaps of wealth in it, Jack, heaps!"

The leader of the vigilantes uttered some words in a growling undertone, among which a few notes like curses could easily be imagined.

As he was a man illiterate in speech, ugly in features, and ungainly in form, the sarcastic words of the girl caused a low laugh to run through the few spectators who were standing around.

But Diamond Dick interrupted the conversation, which indicated a fatal denouement.

"Hold on, Blossom! ye'r chippin' in on a game that'll throw you cold fust thing ye know," he observed. "Ye've got a good tork-in' machine in yer head, an' ye know how ter work it, but they've told Diamond Dick ter git up an' git, an' git up an' git he will."

"Then, by all the chow-chow of a Chinook chief, I'll go with ye!" the spirited girl exclaimed, firmly. "Just you wait for me until I git my double X locomotive power, and I'll wipe the mud of Gunnison City from my pedal extremities, you bet!"

Then, without waiting for a reply, she darted down the street.

Diamond Dick, too, turned and took a cross-cut road.

"Wall, cap'n, I'll jist git my hoss," he remarked, at parting, "an' then ye'll hev ter look derved sharp ter see me shake ther town."



"We'll be lookin'—don't let thet worry ye, Diamond," Jack Barr retorted, significantly.

A faint, curious smile flickered for a moment on the lips of the be-diamonded Hercules as he strode away, closely followed by the vigilantes.

His destination was near at hand, and soon he paused at a rude log-built hut wherein his steed, a beautiful, strong animal, black in color, was confined.

In a few moments he completed the saddling of the animal, strapped his blankets behind the seat, and, with a careless "So long, boys!" he vaulted into the saddle and galloped from the city, whose newly formed, rugged ethics had driven him into exile.

A minute or two later Cactus Blossom came flying up the road, mounted on a wild-looking, dark-hided mustang.

She uttered a sneering laugh as she passed the vigilantes.

But Jack Barr, with a muttered "She's onny a gal, boys," led the way back into the town.

## CHAPTER II.

### A HORRIBLE DISCOVERY.

When fairly upon the road, Cactus Blossom put her horse to his fullest speed, and soon overtook Diamond Dick, who had checked the gait of his steed to await her coming.

The fearless, fair-faced young woman gave a clear, ringing laugh as she rode alongside of the pale-faced, handsome man of mystery, and her eyes and features were glowing with an expression hard to designate.

"I say, pard, those fellows back there played it fine on you, didn't they?" she remarked, gleefully. "Why, the way Jack Barr talked, ye might have taken him for the king-pin of the whole country."

"He war ridin' a high-hoss, thet's a fact, my little beauty," Diamond Dick answered, laughing; "but you chipped in mighty peart, too, my—er! Blossom of ther cactus."

"Bet yer pedigree from way back on that!" cried the girl. "I war there as natural as a knot in a log. But, I say, pard, did Jack Barr know what sort of a hand he war play-

ing when he ordered you to vamoose the ranch?"

"Did he? Wall, I shed remark so! It war a salted idea 'tween me 'n him ter keep me on ther wrong side o' human life, 'cause I'm on ther pay drift at last an' I mean business."

"I sabbe, pard; you've struck the right lead."

"Wall, not jess in ther bull's-eye, but I panned out a few bottom facts that'll fetch me onto ther ledge I'm drillin' fur."

"Thet's fine as flour, pard, but where are we emigrating to?"

"Sumwhar up in ther Saddle Range," was the reply; "thar's a curious new diggin' up among them mountains thet I wanten find, an' when I reach thet camp I reckon I'll git my eyesight an' grip on what I'm arter."

"And I'll be with ye, pard, from seconds to centuries—you can bet your shadow on that, every time!" Cactus Blossom observed, with a grave shake of her golden-haired head.

Diamond Dick smiled, and for a time connected conversation was debarred by the rough nature of the road over which their horses proceeded only with great difficulty.

They had left Gunnison City shortly before noon, and about seven hours later in the day they entered the district of the precipitous, rugged, and grim-looking range of the lofty Saddle Mountains.

There were no defined roads or trails among these barren, rocky peaks, but Diamond Dick led the way, and Cactus Blossom followed close.

The crystal-gemmed, melancholy faced, handsome man never hesitated, but urged his animal up the steep inclines, and along narrow ledges, where a single misstep would result in a dangerous fall.

It was evident that Diamond Dick had certain information upon which he relied to reach his destination, a somewhat mysterious mining town, whose location was a secret, and which was known by the electric title of the "Lightning Lode."

Some wonderful rumors had been circulated of the enormous treasure in the mines over which this town predominated, and many parties had been organized to visit and become part of this new bonanza "find."



But so far not a sign of the Lightning Lode had rewarded the daring explorers, and finally the existence of such a place was discredited by the majority—the reports set down as the invention of some disordered brain.

Nevertheless Diamond Dick rode steadily onward, his dark eyes glancing swiftly about from side to side, noting every object with the keen, inquisitive looks of a trained sleuthhound.

Shortly before nightfall, however, he slackened the pace of his horse, and finally halted in a small ravine, his features overcast with doubt and bewilderment.

Cactus Blossom eyed him for a time with curious glances.

"What's up, pard?" she inquired, at last; "struck yer bull's-eye?"

"Wall, not by er mile or two, Blossom," Diamond Dick answered, somewhat dubiously. "I reckon we air in ther wrong tunnel—leastwise the lay of ther land don't foller suit to my lead. Mebbe I missed a p'int, or else ther information I got war a lie."

"Then we are in a hole, with no ladder handy to climb out on," the girl remarked, coolly. "It'll be night soon, and I reckon we are stuck here until sun-up."

"I dunno but what ye air right, Blossom—it'll be dark right away, an' thar's no sense in goin' back on ther trail in ther shadder o' night—we mought lose all ther indications. So, what do yer say? Shall we hang up here fur mornin'?"

"I say you have struck pay dirt right in the spinal column, pard," Cactus Blossom observed, cheerfully, as she sprang from her mustang. "There is water here, and plenty of grass for the horses, and I'm tired, to boot. But I say, pard, will we sup on the splendid shadows of the starry night, or have you anything more substantial to try our teeth on?"

"Wall, I reckon thar's sumthin' in this pack thet'll mount our hunger," Diamond Dick replied. "But ye won't find the grub ther softest in ther eatin' line, me Cactus Blossom."

"Packed down for a close deal, eh?"

"Jess so; ye've hit it right in ther head, fust time."

"Well, I don't care if it's as hard as the cheek of a railroad ticket-slinger; I can get myself around it—give me time," and the fair-faced girl laughed sweetly as she finished.

Both the girl and Diamond Dick were soon engaged in unsaddling the steeds, which were turned out, and picketed securely.

Diamond Dick returned to the edge of the stream and busied himself in building a fire, but Cactus Blossom roved about the ravine and lingered a short time at the upper end.

As she turned to rejoin her comrade, she suddenly halted and uttered a startled cry, and stood for a few moments like one turned into stone, an expression of horror upon her bright face.

Startled at her attitude, Diamond Dick hurried to her side, a revolver in his hand, his dark eyes flashing keenly.

But he, too, gave vent to an exclamation of mingled horror and surprise at the sight which met his gaze.

Lying upon the rocks, and partly concealed by some thick underbrush, was the body of a woman whose years of life had not been many, but whose form was magnificent in outline and development, and whose features had possessed a beauty that was almost unearthly in splendor.

The dress in which the unfortunate woman had been clad was almost completely torn from her body, and right over the heart the silver hilt of a stiletto appeared, the sharp-pointed blade driven deep into the white, beautiful bosom.

The face of this unfortunate creature was cut and gashed in an inhuman manner that rendered it ghastly beyond description.

On her forehead two cuts formed a cross which laid the skull bare, both of the cheeks were horribly slashed by a keen-edged knife, either during the struggle which her clothing indicated had taken place, or after the dagger had penetrated her heart. Nor was this all. In a number of places on her neck, shoulders, and arms the same weapon had perpetrated similarly hideous work.

"In ther name of God! who is the black-hearted, cussed coyote that could a done this foul deed?" Diamond Dick gasped out.



Cactus Blossom exclaimed through her clenched teeth:

"The devil, or an Injun, none other."

"Muss bin a devil—a white one, 'cause no redskin'd a left his dagger behind," and Diamond Dick bent forward, gently lifting an arm of the murdered woman from the ground.

"Be durned!" he remarked, slowly. "It ain't long since this war did, Cactus Blossom; look here! She ain't even stiff yet. I reckon on ther feller as did this heered us a comin', an' scooted before he could cover his cowardly work."

"By all the howls of a hurricane, I believe you have sized it up right, pard," Cactus Blossom assented, sternly; "but what, in the name of Satan, was the terrible deed committed for?"

"I dunno, me gal; we'll look aroun' fur signs; but you kin bet ther roots of yer hair thet 'f I strike a trail, I'll run ther cuss down as done this."

Diamond Dick's pale face was stern and dark, and his low words were uttered in a tone which boded ill for the murderer, should they chance to meet.

He was carefully searching the pockets and garments of the mutilated woman, to discover an indication of her identity, or the cause of her awful fate.

But nothing rewarded his search—not a jewel, not the slightest scrap of paper, not even a ring on the fingers was found to point out a possible clew.

Whatever might have led to the poor victim's identification had been removed from her person, doubtless by the foul-hearted scoundrel who had committed the hideous deed.

Unknown, cut down in the splendor of youth, her face marred almost beyond recognition, the beautiful form had been left where it fell, to form a feast for the savage animals of the mountain wilds.

Meanwhile, Cactus Blossom had been moving about the scene of the tragedy, her form bent, her keen eyes scouring the ground for any sign which would render a clew to the mysterious murder.

But daylight was fading fast in the little

ravine, and she was finally compelled to abandon her search.

"It's getting too dark, pard, and I give it up," she said, as she came to the side of Diamond Dick. "The ground is mostly rock, and I could find nothing."

"Wall, we'll have ter throw up the job fur to-night, little un; but I'll give it a shake up ter-morrer, you kin bet yer inheritance on thet!" was Diamond Dick's moody response. "I dunno what's got inter my head, but I'm 'way up sure thet sum low down, double-banked work hes bin done here, and I'm goin' ter foller ther lead if I kin ketch holt of a keerd or two."

"And I'll back you up, tooth and nail, pard! But say, Diamond, that woman must have been a bang-up butterfly when she was living—ay, and she don't look like a mining town beauty, if you hear me."

"No, she was pure and good, I'll bet my top-not on thet! She wa'n't none o' yer flimsy-footed flyers of the dance hall. But what gits me air how she got down inter this gully."

"Well, pard, my idea is this. She was either hunting some one, or was led here by a fellow she trusted, and that man put the knife into her."

"I reckon ye'r right, Cactus; and as ther dagger air the onny pint left, I'm goin' ter corral it." Then, with a visible shudder, Diamond Dick gently drew the deadly blade from the breast of the murdered lady.

It was a curious weapon, the blade triangular in shape, and about eight inches long from hilt to point, the haft of solid silver, handsomely engraved and chased.

But neither on blade or hilt was there any indication of where it was made, or to whom it had belonged.

Diamond Dick thoughtfully wiped the crimson stains from the weapon, and carefully placed it in his bosom.

"I say, Diamond Dick," inquired the young girl, "are we going to leave this—er—this poor body here for the night?"

"Wall, I reckon so," was the reply. "She ain't fur from ther camp-fire, but I wanter git a sight of her in daylight. See, Blossom?"

Cactus Blossom made no further remark,



and they returned to the fire and set about preparing their eatables—some hard tack and smoked bacon, washed down with a canful of strong coffee.

The meal over, blankets were spread on the ground, the fire replenished, and a stock of wood gathered to keep it going during the night.

For an hour or two Diamond Dick and his bright little partner sat near the burning brands, their conversation, naturally, about the awful crime which had been committed in the ravine.

Presently, however, they forced themselves to forget the gruesome subject for the time being, their talk drifting into personal matters in an odd way, to say the least, or what would have puzzled an invisible outside auditor not a little, at all events.

At last Blossom, eyeing her companion in an oddly quizzical way, burst into a musical laugh.

"My eye, Diamond! how naturally you and I manage to pard it together on—on—a short acquaintance, eh?"

The man's lips trembled a little humorously, too, but then he scratched his head slowly, and steadfastly maintained his gravity.

"Wall, yes, Blossom," he replied, "'pears that way to me, too, me little gal. But then mebbe our 'quaintance ain't quite so short as them Gunnison smarties thort fur, you know."

"An' how 'bout thet little boy, Bertie, what one of the freshies inquired about, Diamond?" continued the girl, still with a latent merriment.

"Mebbe he's dead, Blossom—really gone up over the Big Divide," was the grave response. "You orter know ez well ez me."

"True as you live, pard. But how long air we to keep this little comedy up between us?"

"You heerd thet chap ask about that bogus duck what's imitatin' my style, didn't ye?—thet Crystal Chip, as he calls hisself?" was the question Diamond Dick put in response.

"Did I? Well, I should say so, pard."

"Wall, then, nat'rally, this new dodge betwixt an' between you an' me, an' the pore

leettle chap what mought hev gone up over the Divide, is boun' to continner, me Blossom, till thet double of mine, thet ornery Crystal Chips, is run to airth in this here leettle game of ourn. You surely orter understan' thet, me honey-pot and beeswax."

Blossom again burst out laughing, but she controlled herself enough to say:

"Yes, yes, old pard, of course I understand that it's a sly, an' a deep, an' a waitin' game with thet chap an' his secret gang. But why should we keep up the deception so strictly, even when we're quite alone together, you know."

"In order to keep in practice when we ain't alone," Diamond Dick replied, with somewhat unwonted severity. "But hev'n't I 'splained this to yer often enough, sonny—or, ruther, me own leettle gel, ez I should say."

"Yes, yes, pard," the girl replied, with sudden humility. "I'll try not to forget agin. Only," the ripe lips twitching a little still, "it will keep a-seemin' so singular, pard."

"Let her keep a-seemin so, ez long ez the secret's kep' solid an' dark, me beauty. Now, let's bunk in, fur a change." And setting the example, Diamond Dick rolled himself up in his blanket by the fire.

Cactus Blossom dutifully followed suit, but presently called out:

"Say, pard, what name does the Crystal Chip gang call themselves by, I wonder?"

"Dunno!" was the sleepy rejoinder. "P'raps they'se the unknown, or mebbe they come 'thought callin' excep' by a dinner bell."

For a long period a grim silence rested over that small ravine, only the snapping of a log in the fire every now and then breaking the stillness.

But just how long he slept without disturbance Diamond Dick never knew, but finally he felt a rude hand shaking him by the shoulder. At the same time a cold object was pressed against his temple, and a deep-toned voice growled into his ear:

"Git up! an' don't 'tempt ter draw a shootin' iron, or I'll put a blastin' cartridge into yer head.

In startled amazement Diamond Dick



raised himself to a sitting position, and gazed about the camp, refusing to believe the evidence of his eyesight.

He saw Cactus Blossom seated upon her blankets in a position similar to his own, and at her side stood a number of beings clad in white, their faces masked with some covering designed after the human features, but ghastly as death.

Near his own person stood two or three of these masqueraders, each revolver in hand; and as Diamond Dick reached to his belt he found that his revolvers had been removed.

All about the camp, in motion some, but motionless the most, still more of the masked men were gathered, human beings all, Diamond Dick concluded, but one and all so thoroughly concealed by their death-like disguises that not a part of their forms was left exposed to view—only the eyes gleaming through the sockets of the sightless masks were visible.

In a few seconds the bediamonded man of Gunnison had recovered his coolness, and, glancing into the eyes of the masked leader at his side, he said calmly:

"I hear yer call, cap'n, an' I show up; I've got nothin', an' I reckon ther pot air yours."

"And I reckon we'll take it in," was the equally cool response. "We are the Salamanders of Saddle Range, an' we generally mean business when we show up. Jest now we want you, Diamond Dick—want you bad."

### CHAPTER III.

#### A STRUGGLE WITH THE SALAMANDERS.

The significant words of the curiously disguised being, who was evidently the leader of this mysterious band, seemed to astonish Diamond Dick into a state of mind bordering on stupefaction.

This was the first time he had ever set foot in the Saddle Mountain region of Gunnison, and that these masked men knew of his coming and had sought him out for some purpose, good or bad, seemed an incident beyond his comprehension.

But, after a few moments of silence,

Diamond Dick apparently recovered his faculties of speech and motion, for he rose slowly, threw aside his blankets and remarked coolly:

"I say, cap, ain't you driftin' on ther wrong lode—playin' poker with a keno outlay, as it were? What in ther name o' sin do yer want me fur?"

A low, curious laugh came from the motionless lips of the mask which concealed the face of the disguised chief, and then in stern accents his deep-toned voice rang out:

"What we want you for you shall know soon enough. As for the other matter, the Salamanders of Saddle Range never show their hands unless sure of the game. You are Diamond Dick, of Gunnison?"

"I'm Diamond Dick, sure's yer born, cap, but you kin use me for a hole in ther groun' if I knowed there war enny one up here as wanted me."

"No? Well, my fragment of jewel fame, we've been expecting you every day since you left Denver, after your interview with the chief of police.

Diamond Dick looked upon the masked being apparently with an expression of blank astonishment upon his features.

"Wal, may I be chawed inter mincemeat, cap," he said in a tone of voice which seemed to plainly indicate that he was puzzled, "but 'f you Salamanders ain't on a blind trail, I'm a liar!"

The masked chieftain laughed mockingly.

"You play it fine, Diamond Dick, but it won't do," he observed, sneeringly.

"We know all about your designs in coming to this section of the land—ay! Knew it even before you set foot in Gunnison City. As soon as the police chief issued your commission the fact was sent to us, and when you left Denver you were shadowed mile after mile by one of these men. You were banished out of Gunnison yesterday by the vigilantes; but you had already received information that apparently pointed out the secret road by which to reach Lightning Lode. It suited your purpose to get there; but, pilgrim, the points you picked up were cast out by a Salamander of Saddle Range for the purpose of leading you here where



we could get hold of you; and, look you, Diamond Dick, alias John Sherry, detective pro tempore, your police spy business ends now and here!"

Diamond Dick had listened to the Salamander leader apparently in speechless amazement; but now, as the chief finished, the romantic visaged captive bent a peculiar look upon Cactus Blossom, and made a slight, swift gesture with his left hand.

It was evidently a secret signal of importance, for the girl nodded her head and uttered a slight cough.

Then, turning to the masked chief, Diamond Dick coolly remarked:

"Cap, I reckon ye mean all ye say, an' ye've played yer cards as square's a dice; but I tell ye agin thet yer way off yer centre. My name ain't no more John Sherry than yours is."

"What is your name then?" the masked chief inquired, sharply.

"That's my biz," was the composed answer. "An' as fur thet Denver business ye've bin slingin' out, ye've made a bad mistake. I never seen no perlice chief, an' I ain't no derective, an' ther man what shad-dered me frum ther capital city o' Colorado, orter stan' on his head ter see 'f he couldn't dror sum brains from ther groun'."

"Don't fool yerself on that point, Jack Sherry; the Salamanders of Saddle Range don't make no mistake in such matters, and you either go back or remain here suspended from the limb of a tree!"

Diamond Dick gave a sneering laugh.

There was an expression upon his features, a gleam in his eyes, which was not pleasant to behold.

"I reckon I ketch on ter yer game now, me chief of ther fireeaters," he said, mockingly. "You fellers air frum Lightnin' Lode, an' ye've panned out this perlice spy story ter scare us away. But ye can't do it. When Diamond Dick heads fur enny place, he gits thar, or sumthin' breaks! Ye hold ther drop on us now, but by all there pitchforks o' ther devil, we don't turn back on their trail, fur no set o' sardines like you fellers!"

"Do ye hear that, my splendid sunflowers of fiery food?" Cactus Blossom chipped in,

evidently influenced by the defiant words of her handsome dare-devil pard. "That's the way we talk when we mean business, and you can bet the nails in your boot heels, that we'll get to Lightning Lode if we have to pay Satan for it, and no pitch hot."

It was the first time during the curious scene that the girl had ventured a word, and her clear, silvery-voice startled the masked men.

"You're ten and we two," Cactus Blossom continued; "but give us half a show, and if we don't make shadows out of your Salamander team, I'll agree to bury myself forty feet under ground!"

The eyes of the Salamander chief flashed upon the features of the fair-faced girl a look of stern contempt.

"You keep your talk out of this, or there will be two forms swinging above ground in the noose of a rope," he exclaimed.

But Cactus Blossom, with a mocking grimace, coolly confronted the masked bravo.

"You-don't-say-so!" she said, in a nasal, drawling tone, "wal, now, if you was to hang me and I found it out, I'll put a stop to it so utterly quick, that it would be next year before you knew what happened."

"An' 'f ye hear my voice lubricating yer ear-drums," Diamond Dick interposed, "ye don't hold no rope as'll go roun' my neck."

The masked chief uttered a grating curse.

"Fools! you will have it then?" he hissed. "Seize them boys! tie the girl, and swing the cursed police spy up on the first handy limb!"

The Salamanders sprang forward, eager to carry out his fierce orders.

But a cold, ringing voice suddenly shouted: "Back! ye dogs, or by ther eternal God, yer chief goes down!"

It was Diamond Dick who uttered the words, a small revolver concealed in his sleeve, flashed into sight, the hammer raised, the muzzle pressed against the white mask which concealed the face of the Salamander leader.

At the same moment Cactus Blossom, with a motion like lightning in its swiftness, whipped from beneath her coat a brace of pistols, and with gleaming eyes leveled the weapon full upon the masked men.



For a moment or two all was silence, the Salamanders, momentarily taken aback by the sudden turn of affairs, standing motionless as statues of stone.

The chief of the band glared into the eyes of Diamond Dick with a look of stony astonishment, the hand holding the revolver hanging motionless at his side, his breath coming and going in quick-drawn gasps.

Then the voice of Diamond Dick rang out sharp and commanding.

"Put up yer pistils," he cried; "everyone o' ye! back ter yer belts with 'em!"

The ringing voice of the bediamonded man acted upon the masked men like a command from their leader.

One and all they replaced the weapons in the sheaths strapped about their waists, evidently so dazed at the deadly change in their position that they obeyed more through instinct than willingness.

"Hold 'em steady, Blossom," Diamond Dick called out, sharp and crisp; "'f enny of them 'tempt ter draw, salivate 'em!"

"I hear you, pard," Cactus Blossom answered, laconically, and the revolvers in her hands never quivered a hair's-breadth.

"Now then, me fire-eating fairy, jess you open yer han' an' let thet shootin-iron drop!" Diamond Dick observed to the Salamander chief, and his voice was as chilly as an iceberg.

The masked leader uttered a low curse, and for the instant some desperate resolution seemed to fill his heart.

But the weapon in the hand of Diamond Dick stared him in the face, and the magnetic eyes of the melancholy adventurer gleaned over the sights with a glance whose deadly warning could not be denied.

"Ye hear what I say?" Diamond Dick continued, icily. "Drop that pistil, an' do it quick!"

With a furious imprecation, the Salamander leader allowed the weapon to slip from his grasp.

"Curse you!" he hissed; "I'll get even on you for this deal! By all the power of the Salamander circle. I swear to hunt you down to death, if you don't take the back track!"

"Will you!" Diamond Dick sneered. "Ye'll

be doin' derved well 'f ye git away from here alive, yerself. Ye've played a mighty on-healthy high han' ternight, but ye'll hev ter git angel wings ter mount over me, 'f I do say it myself."

"We will see," the Salamander chief replied, gloomily. "The Salamanders of Saddle Range never fail in their purpose; they neither forgive nor forget."

"I s'pecks not; all ye wanten do now is ter knock off eatin' fire an' live on electric lights," Diamond Dick observed, sarcastically. "But long's it's goin' ter be war 'tween me 'n you, jess you take thet kiver off yer face, so's I'll know ye 'f we mought meet again!"

"Never!" the masked man retorted through his gnashing teeth. "No living man shall look upon the face of Salamander Sol while he is alive!"

"Won't, eh?" Diamond Dick said, coldly. "Look here now. Ef ye don't take thet dead face frum yer head in ten seconds I'll blow a hole through ye big enuff ter drive a full team through, you hear me!"

An ominous murmur; a low, snarling growl came from the men of the reptilian name, and several hands fell upon weapons.

But Cactus Blossom was watching every motion of the masked creatures with the eyes of a lynx, and her voice rang out as sharp as the edge of a knife.

"Easy there! drop your hands from your belts, or, by the curse of Cain, I'll throw ye cold!"

The big brown eyes of the girl were blazing like fire, and her sternly set lips conveyed a resolute meaning not to be doubted.

Slowly, reluctantly the Salamander men removed their grasp from the butts of their weapons, but fierce, threatening glances were cast upon the fearless girl which boded ill for her future welfare.

Meanwhile Salamander Sol had raised a hand to the white, motionless object which hid his face, his eyes were glaring wildly through the eye-holes of the mask and his chest was heaving with a fury beyond description.

"Time's up!" Diamond Dick cried, fiercely.

"Air yer goin' ter take thet mask off or not,



say one or the other, an' say it derved quick!"

For an answer the form of Salamander Sol dropped slightly, and then, like a flash of lightning, his clenched hand shot out, landing upon the breast of Diamond Dick a blow so terrific in force that black-ringleted man was whirled half-around, the shock causing his pistols to discharge harmlessly into space.

The next second a revolver was in the hand of the masked chief, and his voice, hoarse with passion, rose on the air:

"At them, my bullies! down with the cursed spies!" he shouted; and, leveling his revolver, he fired at Diamond Dick.

But, like a flash of light, the diamond-studded adventurer dropped to the ground, the deadly bullet hissing harmlessly over his head.

Then, with a tiger-like motion, he raised his weapon, pulled the trigger, and Salamander Sol uttered a groan of pain.

Following this shot like echoes, four successive reports flashed from the pistols in the hands of Cactus Blossom, and high above the yells of the masked men and the reports of their pistols, rose the shrieks of the creatures whom the unerring aim of the girl had sent into eternity.

Then, with the spring of a squirrel, Salamander Sol dashed away into the darkness, and a moment after his masked men followed like shadows—all save the four whom Cactus Blossom's revolvers had placed beyond motion.

"Out of ther firelight, Blossom!" Diamond Dick shouted. "Into cover with ye afore ye git a back shot!"

And he himself bounded out of the circle of light thrown by the fire into the bushes, while Cactus Blossom imitated his example on the instant.

Then, with eyes alert and ears strained to the utmost tension, the fearless girl and her handsome pard watched, with pistols ready for instant use.

But the footsteps of the fleeing Salamanders had ceased to echo in the ravine, and a dead, grim silence hovered over the mountain barriers.

For over an hour they crouched in the bushes, watching and waiting for sign or sound.

But nothing of a suspicious nature again broke the solitude of the rock-bound gully, and Diamond Dick finally rose to his feet.

"I reckon they've lit out fur good, Blossom," he said, guardedly; "an' it's about time, fur, see, day is breakin'."

He pointed to some faint gray streaks in the sky—heralds of the sun.

"Yes; and I reckon our horses are gone, too!" cried Cactus Blossom, gazing disconsolately toward the space of ground where the animals had been picketed, a look of disgust upon her face.

"Sure 'nuff!" Diamond Dick growled. "Them cusses must 'a' bin in a 'tarnal hurry ter git away."

"I reckon so, but some of them didn't seem to be in haste to leave us."

As the girl spoke, she pointed significantly to the inanimate forms of the masked men who had perished by her deadly shots.

Diamond Dick knitted his brows moodily as he gazed upon the motionless forms.

"We had ter do it, Cactus Blossom," he said, slowly. "They played a strong game on us, an' they meant business—it was their lives or our'n. But let's have a look at 'em."

He led the way to the inanimate forms of the masked men, removed the white, human-like disguises, and gazed into their rigid faces, distorted by pain and the spasms of death.

All of the slain men were brutal looking fellows, and each had a bullet-hole in his forehead, just between the eyes.

But in none of the features could Diamond Dick recognize a face that he had ever before seen.

And then, while Cactus Blossom was preparing the morning meal, the dark-haired man stood over these dead forms, his brow again dark, his head bent in deep thought.

"Thar's only one solution to this mysterious attack," he muttered at last. "These fellers were led by a man who knew my business, and that man must have been my game. Now, by all the fates, I'll tear the mask from Salamander Sol's face, sooner or later, if I have to follow him to the North Pole—if he's my animal, I'll fetch him in, dead or alive."

And with this Diamond Dick turned away, and busied himself in gathering up the few articles that constituted their outfit.

The simple meal prepared by the girl was soon dispatched, the few cooking utensils packed away, and then Diamond Dick said, sternly:

"Now fur ther trail of the coyote as murdered that young woman! Come, Blossom; for'ard, march's the word!"

Then swinging the traps over his broad shoulders, he moved up the ravine, Cactus Blossom at his side.

The riding harness was necessarily left behind, the horses having been run off by the Salamanders, but the weapons which had been treacherously removed from their belts while they were slumbering they had recovered.



So, with resolute face, Diamond Dick set out to run down the cruel being who had cut-short the life of the beautiful woman.

But, reaching the spot where the unfortunate woman had met her horrible death, he suddenly uttered an astonished cry.

The mutilated creature was gone!

Spirited away, doubtless, during the night by some agency so silent in its action that no sound had betrayed its presence, and no sign being left as to the direction in which it had vanished with its dread burden.

Search as they might, like beagles on a broken scent, not a trace was discovered, not a foot-print, not an indication revealed to their keen, questioning eyes.

Long after sunrise they roved over the ground, but the task was useless. The body of the beautiful woman had disappeared as utterly as if the earth had opened and swallowed it up.

"It ain't no use, Blossom," Diamond Dick observed, at last. "We've lost the grip, an' there ain't no use wastin' more time here. Whoever yanked that body away knew enuff ter leave no trail.

"You're right, pard, but I wonder if those Salamander coyotes didn't have a hand in it," Cactus Blossom observed, curiously.

"Mebbe they did; but thar ain't nothin' to show for it," Diamond Dick replied, his voice plainly betraying disgust. "An' to tell the honest truth, I dunno what ter think. Them fire-eaters acted so durned curis, mebbe the war onny a blind ter cover this work."

"It looks that way."

"Wall, it won't do no good standin' here a speckerlatin'. We've got one lead, anyway. It don't amount ter much, but it may work in fine. I've got ther dagger as killed the poor woman."

"That's a fact, pard, and that stiletto will run the fellow down, if you hear me squeal."

"I hope so; but let us get on ther move. I wanten make Lightnin' Lode ter-day."

They were standing on an eminence which commanded a good view of the surrounding country, and Diamond Dick's face brightened as he caught sight of a lone tree jutting out from the side of a cliff.

"Thar's the pint I missed last night," he cried. "An' thar, in the heart of yonder mountain peak, we'll run against ther shanities of ther Lightnin' Lode."

"Then let's ambulate," Cactus Blossom remarked, laconically.

Diamond Dick said no more, but, taking the lead, headed straight for the objective point.

About noon they reached the edge of an immense forest, black with shadows, and so

thick with underbrush as to be almost impassable.

Out of this forest the giant mountain peak seemed to rise, but it was evidently a matter of difficulty to reach its base.

Diamond Dick, however, did not hesitate. At a certain point he entered the forest, and threaded his way among the giant trees, never at fault in finding a pathway through the matted vines and thick underbrush.

Later in the afternoon they reached a point where the forest grew thinner, and pausing at last on what appeared like an opening, Diamond Dick pointed before him.

"Thar's Lightnin' Lode, Blossom," he said, quietly. "An' now we buckle down to work."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FARO QUEEN OF GOLD BRICK.

After all the reports, true and false, and the general disbelief in the existence of the wondrous mines, the town of Lightning Lode was really an established fact.

But that it was difficult to find, unless guided by the most minute instruction, was a matter easily understood, for no mining camp was more snugly hidden from the curious explorers or keen-sighted prospectors than the twenty or more log-built structures which formed the "city" of Lightning Lode.

The smooth-faced peak which rose high into the clouds, and was belted with an almost impregnable forest, miles in circumference, was cut open at a certain point, and formed a blind canon or gully, not quite a mile in length, and less than quarter that in width.

In this canon a vein, or lode, rich in gold and silver, had been discovered by a party of prospectors who had finally located the town, and as the future developments revealed a source of wealth far beyond their utmost imagination, they had given the collection of huts the electrical name of Lightning Lode.

In a very short time the population of the town had increased to a hundred and twenty souls; a few saloons had been established, a free-and-easy dance hall, a store, and a paramount gambling establishment called "The Gold Brick."

Sometimes a stranger would tumble on the city through pure luck, but they were few and far between, and were allowed to remain, but sworn to keep the existence of the wonderful wealth-laden lode a secret.



Thus Lightning Lode became, in an individual sort of way, one of the liveliest and roughest places on the border.

It is a few hours after sunset as we enter the town, and work in the tunnels having ceased for the day, the miners are enjoying themselves in the places of amusements.

But in respect of numbers the gambling saloon of Gold Brick contains the majority.

It is a large structure built of logs, this gambling den, and the whole ground floor is but one apartment devoted to games of chance.

But it was a cozy place, and well fitted up for that out-of-the-way spot.

The log walls and rafters were covered with canvas, and a soft carpet was stretched upon the floor.

The back end of the apartment was occupied by a bar; a faro-table and about a dozen tables, with plenty of chairs scattered about, lined either side of the room.

There was a large number of miners in the gaming saloon, early as was the evening, for the Gold Brick contained an attraction even greater than the nuggets and gold dust which were nightly staked upon the tables.

Seated in a cushioned arm chair near the faro outlay in the centre of the room was a beautiful young woman of eighteen or twenty years of age.

She was slightly above the medium height of her sex, and every motion of her faultless form was accompanied by a grace that was bewildering.

Her features were regular in outline and plump as a peach; her eyes black as sloes, and sparkling with the starry radiance of the midnight skies.

Her dark hair was simply coiled upon the back of her head, and through the dark strands a gold-hilted, keen-pointed dagger was thrust for ornament.

This weapon was small in size, but a story was current among the miners that its point was so coated with a subtle poison, that a mere scratch of the blade meant certain death.

This girl was Annie Darley, the daughter of the handsome, middle-aged proprietor of the Gold Brick, but about the town she was more popularly known as the Faro Queen.

Well educated, pleasant in compliment and sharp in retort, witty, bright, generous, no one could say, with truth, anything against her name.

She seemed a fair flower blooming in a miasma more deadly than the noxious exhalations of typhus.

It was yet too early in the night to open the faro game, and a number of brawny miners

were gathered about the girl, exchanging words in which the men received the worst of it.

"Ah! there's Tom Wilson," the girl remarked, as a young fellow entered the room and advanced eagerly to her side. "Good evening, Mr. Tom, I hear that you have struck luck at last in your mine."

"Not luck, but gold," was the prompt reply. "If I had struck luck, you wouldn't be in this place."

"Oh, thank you!" with a light laugh; "but I am informed that you have become desperate—have, in fact, threatened no less than to break up our bank through the medium of faro."

"Well, why shouldn't I? You have broken my heart, and I intend to bust the bank. To be revenged, is mortal, to forgive, divine, or something like that, the poets say."

The beautiful Faro Queen laughed pleasantly. And then a burly, broad-shouldered miner suddenly remarked:

"Hello! here's Crystal Chip!"

A flash of light, an expression more delightful than pleasure leaped into the eyes and features of the Faro Queen as she gazed upon the tall, graceful form advancing toward her, a smile upon his pallid face.

Dressed very similarly in the close-fitting, black velvet costume, with sombrero, top-boots, and weapon loaded belt, such as characterized Diamond Dick himself, whom he likewise considerably resembled in form and feature, this individual, Crystal Chip, who had for some time been unenviably notorious in the wild community of Lightning Lode and thereabouts, came forward smilingly and with something of a swagger in response to the greeting gaze of the Faro Queen.

But if Crystal Chip was something of a startling imitation in looks, dress and bearing, to the nobler and more reputable adventurer, it was an imitation that was only successful in an external sense.

His hair and mustache were coarse, straight and bronze-hued instead of jet black, silky and curling; in lieu of the romantic palor that distinguished the true Diamond Dick, this man's complexion was florid, though sunburned; there was also something coarse, cunning, and sinister in his air that was altogether foreign to the other's proud and reserved bearing; and lastly, in place of the genuine diamond ornamentation that was Diamond Dick's distinguishing trait in the matter of apparel, Crystal Chip's dress, as his name indicated, was merely loaded and bedazzled with crystal buttons and gewgaws, sparkling and flashing of their kind, but as inferior to the real article as the wearer



evinced himself to be in comparison with the finer and more sterling character that it seemed his ambition to emulate.

However, apart from these differences, the resemblance of the two men in feature and general characteristics was sufficiently striking, not to say startling, as to have caused no little wondering comment if placed side by side, as they were presently destined to be.

Crystal Chip bowed eagerly over the pretty hand that was cordially extended to him by the Faro Queen.

"Ah, Crystal," she exclaimed, with a coquettish shrug of her shapely shoulders, "better late than never."

The bronze-faced man brightened up at the warmth of her greeting, which, however, he should have been quick-witted enough to note as being more in her words than in the tone that uttered them.

"Thanks!" he replied, and as he proceeded it was evident that he was studiously aping a culture of language and address but little congenial with his native promptings; "but you might have known I couldn't be long away from where you were shining, my princess."

"But where have you been for the past two or three days?" the girl searchingly demanded. "We have missed you greatly, Crystal Chip. In short," and her voice put on a slight tinge of spitefulness, "we were beginning to have a grave suspicion that you had eloped with that lovely lady friend of yours."

Crystal Chip smiled pleasantly.

"You were quite wrong in your suspicions, my queen of faro," he replied. "It was a slight matter of business, not love, which tore me from your beautiful presence."

"But in that case, what has become of your lady friend?" the Faro Queen inquired, keenly.

Crystal Chip glanced at her, a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"I do not understand you," he answered, gravely.

"What! are you not aware that Miss Carey has been missing for the last three days?" the Faro Queen remarked in surprise.

"Missing!" Crystal Chip repeated.

"Ay! carried off by spirits or something more substantial; at least she has disappeared, leaving bag and baggage behind."

The face of Crystal Chip became stern with displeasure, and something like a curse came from between his clenched teeth.

"At the old business again, are you, my beautiful fiend?" he muttered, in a voice almost inaudible.

But the Faro Queen was keenly listening; she caught the full import of the words, and a smile of satisfaction brightened her face.

"Really, Crystal Chip," she continued, "as the young lady was seen leaving the town with you, we all thought it a case of marrying on the sly."

"What? Marry that woman? never!" Crystal Chip answered, a fierce look coming into his florid face. "I would rather cut a hand from my arm!"

"Ah! by the way, what is wrong with your right hand? I see that you have it banded," the Faro Queen remarked, curiously.

"A bruise; severe, painful—nothing more!" Crystal Chip answered, quickly. "But I must investigate this disappearance of Dora Carey, and without any delay."

"And I must open the game," the Faro Queen observed, rising from her seat.

Then a sudden, startling hush fell over the room.

Two persons had entered the portals of the Gold Brick gambling saloon—the one a handsome, romantically pale-visaged man, the other a fair-faced girl, dressed in semi-masculine attire.

They were Diamond Dick and Cactus Blossom.

Careless in manner, and as lithe as a tiger in his movements, Diamond Dick advanced leisurely into the apartment, taking no particular notice of any one until he stood face to face with Crystal Chip.

Then he stopped suddenly, and an expression both of wonder and annoyance came into his face as he gazed upon the bronze-hued florid features of his crystal bedizened counterpart.

And Crystal Chip looked upon the pale-faced stranger with a gleam in his steely eyes which was hard to define.

All eyes were fixed upon the two men with astonishment, for the contrast no less than the resemblance they afforded to one another, was sufficiently remarkable.

Then the two powerfully built, gracefully formed fellows gazed upon each other in silence, their features overcast with wonder, a curious gleam in their mutual searching brilliant eyes.

The voice of the Faro Queen broke the sudden hush.

"Well, may I never play a card again—may I—as sure as I am a living being, there stands your double, Crystal Chip!"

## CHAPTER V.

### DIAMOND DICK AND HIS DOUBLE.

As the voice of the Faro Queen rang out, Crystal Chip drew in a long breath, and something suggestive of a shudder passed over his frame.



Cactus Blossom, ever ready with her tongue, quickly chipped in:

"By the great horn spoon! my diamond-studded pard, is that bronze-faced chap of the bogus brilliants, your twin-brother—say?"

But Diamond Dick answered only with a seemingly amazed:

"Wall, may I ber durned!"

The eyes of the Faro Queen were roving from one face to the other, her own features the picture of blank astonishment, for never, she thought, in her span of life had she gazed upon men who so nearly resembled each other as did these two.

"Wall, stranger, I'm durned 'f ther sight o' ye didn't most take my breath away!" Diamond Dick observed. "I sw'ar, by all creation, I thort I war lookin' at my ghost!"

"And pray, who are you that imitate me so closely?" Crystal Chip inquired, his voice cold and stern.

"Immertate you?" Diamond Dick blurted out, with a guffaw; "come, now, that's good! Me? Why, sure's shootin' ye must 'a' heard o' me, stranger," he continued, good-naturedly. "I'm ther rip-tearin', snortin' ole alligator, called Diamond Dick, late of Gunnison, you understand? An' you, I reckon, air ther high-toned, galivantin' galoot as goes by ther name o' Crystal Chip, Esquire?"

"Reputation, and my characteristic diamond outfit combined," stiffly rejoined the other, "have bestowed upon me the title of Crystal Chip, and my friends address me as such; but to strangers I have a name with a handle to it—Mr. Christopher Conover."

Diamond Dick broke into an amused horse-laugh, whose loudness few would have suspected as assumed, it was so natural and prolonged.

"Ho! ho! ho!" he roared; "haw! haw! haw!" "Your reppertation, an' your diamond outfit!" with a filliping gesture at the garish, spurious adornments, in such cheap contrast with his own. "Wall, I mus' repeat it over ag'in—may I ber durned!"

The spurious adventurer flushed angrily, though managing to keep his temper under for the nonce, the merriment that was evoked around him telling him plainly enough whom the laugh was against.

"All right—O. K., Mister Christopher Conover," continued Diamond Dick, cheerfully; "an' let me hope that you won't walk inter me too deep 'f I ventur' to chip inter yer purtensions a bit."

"I'm not used to submitting to familiarities from strangers, sir," said Crystal Chip,

sharp and icy, drawing himself up. "Let me advise you to understand that!"

"Ho! ho! ho!" roared our hero. "But jest look here, me friend," his mood suddenly changing. "Crystal Chip's your name fur me 's long 's I stay in this town, an' don't you furgit it. But it's durned strange thet I've happened to hear of you afore, my quartz specimen, an' nuthin' pertic'lar to your advantage, nuther."

Crystal Chip drew himself up yet more haughtily, and there was a look in his florid face indicating that, sham as he might be in his pretensions, he could be a dangerous man on occasion.

"Enough!" he retorted, coldly. "Of course," sarcastically, "what you have seen or heard with regard to me is vastly material."

"Wall, thet jest depends, Crystal," with a shrug of the massive shoulders that set the real jewels that gemmed his dress to glistening like the sparks of fire. "But so long as you're livin', I s'pose you kin answer to your feldsparry an' quartz name. So long, me consterlation!"

A cold, steel-like gleam flashed into the eyes of Crystal Chip, but Diamond Dick, after his last remark, sauntered carelessly up to the bar, where a tidy negro served out the liquids.

"Hello, Snowdrift!" the man of diamonds called out, heartily, "jess set out yer A1 electric fluid. I'm dry 's sand-paper. Have sumthin', Cactus Blossom?"

"I reckon a double-barreled cigar 'll suit me," the girl answered, and in a few moments she was puffing away at a strong weed, while Diamond Dick was imbibing with the air of a connoisseur.

Meanwhile Crystal Chip, with a hasty good-night to the Faro Queen, had left the room, seemingly in undisturbed good humor. But as he passed through the doorway he made a rapid, peculiar gesture with his hand.

A few moments later, three men who were playing poker at one of the side tables, threw up their cards, and with a careless air sauntered out into the open air.

Then the fair face of Cactus Blossom drew the attention of the miners, and the girl with her easy grace and witty speech soon became an object around which the men circulated with eager delight.

Diamond Dick, on his part, had drifted to the side of the Faro Queen, where he was having a set-to in words with that fascinating young lady.

Annie Darley discovered after a half hour's conversation, that she was taking an extraordinary interest in the pale-faced, ro-



mantic man of diamonds, which conclusion rather surprised her.

As you may believe, the Faro Queen had many admirers among the inhabitants of Lightning Lode, but the girl had seemingly thus far cared for no one, excepting only Crystal Chip.

For this bronze-haired, rather specious individual, indeed, she had felt a sensation which was almost akin to love.

But now Diamond Dick was apparently working his way into the young woman's susceptible heart, stranger though he was; for it was a positive fact that the romantic diamond-studded frontiersman could on occasion use words as fitting and witty as could the Faro Queen herself, and this ran him far up in the beauty's favor in short order.

The two were very nearly alone, the third party in their presence being Hank Darley, the father of the Faro Queen, who for some reason had taken an inexplicable liking to the new-comer from Gunnison.

After a period of commonplace conversation, Hank Darley drew from him an explanation of why he had visited Lightning Lode.

Diamond Dick affirmed that it was only a matter of curiosity; he had no design to locate a mine, as his financial standing placed him far above the need to labor, he said. And then, cunningly turning the conversation he related his adventures with the Salamanders.

"The what?" Annie Darley inquired, as he first mentioned the name of the masked band.

"Salamanders of Saddle Range they called themselves," was the reply. "An' their leader introduced himself as Salamander Sol."

"Well, this is the first time we ever heard of the existence of a band of road agents of that name," the Faro Queen remarked, in surprise.

"Is that so?" Diamond Dick exclaimed, a keen glance in his eyes.

"As sure as you are here!" Mr. Darley chipped in. "The road agents must be a new gang."

"Wall, thet seems kind o' curis ter me, 'cause I war almost sure they belonged here in Lightning Lode," Diamond Dick remarked, evidently puzzled; for he could see by the marked surprise upon the features of the gambler and his daughter that his information was news to them.

"I give you my word of honor that they are not people of this city, as far as I am aware," Mr. Darley remarked, earnestly. "There are some rough fellows here, but one and all are making wealth hand over fist in the mines. Once in a while we have a row here, but it is a sort of family affair, to which no strangers are admitted."

"Wall, thet kind o' knocks me out, Mister Darley. I thort dead sure it was a game ter keep Cactus Blossom an' me away frum here, an' war got up by ther citizens of Lightnin' Lode."

"Well, if it is so, it's the first time we ever heard of it, Diamond Dick," the Faro Queen interposed; "and we keep pretty well posted on what is taking place," she concluded with a pleasant laugh.

The brows of the handsome adventurer were wrinkled with thought, but after a few moments he finished his story of the Salamanders.

And then, his voice low, he related in graphic words the finding of the murdered woman; describing her horrible mutilation and the final spiriting away of the body.

Both the gambler and the girl listened to his narrative with intense interest, the face of the Faro Queen, especially, growing pale with excitement.

And as Diamond Dick paused for a moment, she inquired quickly:

"Could you describe the appearance of this woman—her age, features, dress?"

"Wall, me Queen of Faro," was the drawled reply, "she war pretty well cut up about ther head, but she war very beautiful in face an' form; her eyes war blue, an' I noticed a small mole on her chin thet——"

"Dora Carey!" the Faro Queen cried, with horror, her eyes wide open, her face blanched to the hue of death.

Diamond Dick gazed at her eagerly.

"What! did you know her?" he demanded, with surprise.

"Did the poor woman have hair of a yellowish hue?" the girl inquired.

"Yes; yeller 's gold."

"About eighteen years old?"

"Jest about thet age."

"Her dress a black and white plaid—small design? A ring containing a diamond, and one of plain gold upon her hand?"

"Thar warn't no rings, jewels, or letters about her, but ye've got thet pattern of ther dress all right."

"Then it was Dora Carey—a lady who disappeared from this city three days ago; but who, in the name of heaven, could have butchered the beautiful young creature in such a horrible way?"

"We could find no sign o' thet. Not a trail was made; no footstep printed on ther ground. Ther only clue we found war this dagger sticking in the bosom of the poor lady." And Diamond Dick drew from a breast-pocket the triangular bladed, silver-hilted stiletto which had cut short the life of the beautiful victim.



The Faro Queen uttered a low cry as her straining eyes rested upon the keen-pointed weapon, her hands and arms trembling as she shrank from contact with the deadly implement.

Her father, too, was looking at the dagger in startled amazement.

"Was—was that the weapon which killed the woman?" he gasped.

Something in the tone of his voice guided Diamond Dick in his next question:

"That was the tool—do you know it, sir?"

But before the gambler could answer, the door of the gambling saloon was thrown open, and six or seven dark-browed, stern-faced men entered the room.

Three of them were those who had followed Crystal Chip; the others had joined them outside.

Straight up to Diamond Dick came the men, revolvers in hand ready for instant use.

Then one remarked sternly, as he placed his hand heavily on the shoulder of the man from Gunnison:

"Diamond Dick, I arrest you in the name of the law of Lightnin' Lode."

"Arrest me!" Diamond Dick exclaimed. "What in ther name o' ther devil's fiends do yer want ter arrest me fur?"

"Fur murder!" the man retorted, sternly.

"Murder! What in thunderation air ye gittin' at, pard?" Diamond Dick inquired, in unfeigned amazement.

"You have murdered a woman called Dora Carey!"

"You're a liar!"

And, with a bound like that of a tiger, Diamond Dick sprang to the wall, his face to his enemies, his eyes flashing along the gleaming barrels of a pair of six-shooters which appeared with the swiftness of magic in his hands.

The next instant Cactus Blossom was at his side, a mocking smile upon her lips, and her big, bright eyes glittering over the sights of the deadly, self-acting revolvers she knew how to use so well.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A HIGH-HANDED ROW.

Following the quick tiger-like bound of Diamond Dick, and the prompt action of Cactus Blossom in ranging herself by the side of her pard, the room became a scene of the wildest confusion.

Believing a deadly fight imminent, the miners strove to get out of the line of fire

where some bullet might accidentally send them into the hereafter to answer for their crimes.

But now, quick as thought, the gentlemanly gambler, Hank Darley, stepped in between Diamond Dick and his accusers.

They were not of the better class of inhabitants, these self-styled border policemen, and the gambler held in his hand a revolver, ready cocked, to check any sudden demonstration of a fight in his cozy gaming den.

"What does this mean, Jim Cardy? By what right do you come into my place with the evident intention of raising a row?" he inquired, sternly, of the leading man of the gang.

"We don't want ter raise no row, Darley," Jim Cardy retorted. "All we want is ter yank thet air galoot away from this sherbang. He's murdered the lady, Dora Carey, and, by the footroots of ther saddle peaks, we air going to make him suffer for it!"

A low murmur of astonishment rang through the room.

It was the first knowledge the miners had received of the tragedy.

But then the voice of Diamond Dick rang out, crisp and sharp as a bell:

"How did you know that the woman war dead, Jim Cardy, and that I murdered her?"

But just as promptly and composedly, Jim Cardy answered:

"I got it from ther fellow who saw you strike the blow which laid her cold."

"Then I tells you an' him both thet ye air a brace o' bloody liars!" Diamond Dick replied, defiantly. "An' I've got a pair o' dogs in me hands thet 'll back me up."

"And when they quit, I am here!" Cactus Blossom remarked, quietly.

But Jim Cardy betrayed no sign of fear or backing down. He was notorious in the town as a bad man, utterly reckless and obstinate in his designs, be they good or bad; and his comrades were known as equally reckless and desperate.

"You fellers had better lay down yer shootin'-irons at once, 'cause it 'll save a heap o' trouble," Jim Cardy remarked, darkly. "We 'uns hav' come here to arrest ye, and we'll do it if this hull house has ter fall down in the act!"

"But I say, mister man, what'll we be doing all this time?" Cactus Blossom observed, caustically.

"Wall, I tell ye what you might be doing," Jim Cardy remarked, sarcastically, "you had better draw away frum this afore ye git hurt. We ain't after you, me gal, so ye'd jest best git outter this muss."

"And I tell you that if I desert a pard in



such a cowardly way and find it out, I'll walk from here to Halifax on my head and kick myself all the way going!" the girl returned, defiantly.

"It won't do, Cardy—you're got to play your hand a little softer," Hank Darley put in, coldly. "And, coming right down to bed rock points, who in the devil's name made you sheriff of this town?"

"Ay! and how comes it, Jim Cardy, that it was this weapon which ended the life of Dora Carey?" the Faro Queen said, sternly, as she held up before the eyes of the self-instituted officer the stiletto which Diamond Dick had drawn from the body of the murdered lady.

The voice of the girl had in it a peculiar intonation which was evidently meant to impress Cardy with its significance.

But Jim Cardy's eyes never so much as winked as he gazed upon the dagger.

"What the devil shed I know about the knife?" he said, rudely. "And, as fur the matter remarked about, Darley, I ain't actin' on my own hook, but on orders I received."

"And who was it gave you this command?" the gambler inquired, haughtily.

"Crystal Chip."

"What! he told you to do this—he, Crystal Chip?" the Faro Queen gasped, her face pale as ashes.

"Jess so; but that fellow, the double of Crystal Chip, needn't kick up a row about this; we ain't going ter run him up a tree lickety-split, but will give him a fair trial according to the border code of Judge Lynch."

"What do you say to this, Diamond Dick?" the father of the Faro Queen inquired.

"I say thet I'd see them fellers seventeen-hundred miles under ground afore I'd trust myself in their hands with weapons gone!" Diamond Dick answered, defiantly. "You know what I told you about findin' ther woman—Dora Carey, as you calls her; an' I swear every word I said war ther truth! These fellows, under this Crystal Chip's leadership, air up to sum game thet ain't fur my good; but, Mr. Darley, 'f ye will jess glance over this little paper, ye'll see thet I ain't bin lyin'." And Diamond Dick extended to the gambler an envelope unsealed.

From this Mr. Darley extracted a paper evidently short in writing, but of such importance that it caused an expression of mingled astonishment, respect, and admiration to spread over his face as he replaced the paper, and handed back the envelope to the owner.

"Of course, I'm playin' a long lead on yer honor, Darley, an' expect ye ter keep ther sayin' of this letter ter yerself," Diamond Dick said, significantly.

"Most assuredly," the gambler answered,

firmly. Then turning to face the miners in the room he went on, warmly: "Boys, from what I have just read, it's a double-banked low down deal to try and ring in a charge of murder on Diamond Dick. You have heard me promise to keep secret the words on that paper, and I shall do so; but you all know me, boys, and you know my word is good for what I say, and I tell you, by all my hopes of the future, that Diamond Dick never killed Dora Carey, and the paper proves it!"

His words greatly impressed the honest better class of the miners, some of whom had been at first inclined to help Jim Cardy and his companions in arresting this stranger.

Hank Darley was a gambler, it was true, but never, since he opened the Gold Brick, was there anything but fair play going on in the apartment, and his few, straight words, cool manners, and pleasant talk had made him much respected in the town, despite his calling.

But Jim Cardy and his companions were not to be daunted by words or documents, and to this speech of the gambler Cardy retorted, angrily:

"I don't keer a cuss fur a hull cart-load of papers, an' all the talk in creation! I was told to bring thet feller in fur trial, and I'm going to do it—dead or alive!"

"Ye don't say so!" Diamond Dick interrupted, sneeringly. "When will ye start in ter do it?"

"Right now!" Jim Cardy grated through his clenched teeth; and with a quick, cat-like bound he sprang forward, his pistol leveled at the heart of Diamond Dick, while with the yells of fiends ringing from their lips, his comrades seconded his onset like so many shadows.

But even quicker than their leaps, the revolvers in the hands of Cactus Blossom rang out in sharp detonations so close together that the reports sounded like a continuous roar.

Once, twice, three, four times the silvered self-acting instruments of death flashed out their deadly contents.

Neither was Diamond Dick idle.

While the bullets of the lynchers were whistling past his ears with ominous hiss, some even scraping his flesh, his revolvers were hurling out their leaden messengers of sudden, swift destruction.

Jim Cardy carried on by the impetuosity of his leap, fell forward against the wall, rebounded and sank to the floor, a hole in his forehead, right between the eyes, where the unerring aim of the girl had sent a bullet; and three more of the men went down under her deadly aim.

As for the others they never so much as



placed a hand upon the pale-faced man from Gunnison, who looked like the god of war in the sudden, savage fight, his ready revolvers completing the fate of the men whom Cactus Blossom had left unharmed.

Not ten seconds after the first shot was fired did the fight last.

When the noise made by forms scrambling away, the clash of overturned tables and chairs had ceased, and the powder smoke had cleared away, Diamond Dick and Cactus Blossom still stood side by side, the girl unharmed, but her companion wounded and bleeding, though still unwaveringly erect.

Before them, one above the other, piled in a heap as they fell, lay the seven creatures who had been delegated to bring them into the grasp of grim Judge Lynch—dead all."

Everywhere about the room miners were crouched under tables, standing motionless behind some slight protection, revolver in hand, awaiting the end of the deadly battle between the two pards and the minions of border law.

Annie, the Faro Queen, was standing near the bar, the gold-hilted dagger before mentioned as being sheathed in her hair, clutched in her hand.

Her father was at her side, the revolver still in his grasp, his eyes seeking to penetrate the smoke which filled the room.

But gradually objects became clearer, and all could see the result of the short, terrible battle.

Annie Darley's face grew pale with horror as she gazed upon the awful sight stretched about the feet of Diamond Dick and his girl pard.

And from all parts of the room came quick-drawn gasps of awe and astonishment as the miners bent their glances upon the inanimate forms lying upon the richly carpeted floor—terrible evidence of the prowess of the dark-haired, bediamonded man, and the fearless-faced girl.

But the affray was over, and Hank Darley came forward followed by the Faro Queen and some of the miners, while the negro bartender righted the overturned furniture, and others drew the dead bodies to one side, where a cloth was thrown over them.

"Serves 'em durned right!" a black-bearded, burly miner observed. "Thet Jim Cardy war runnin' about too lively; an' his mates warn't fur behind him."

"I reckon ye'r right, pard," another observed. "But I want to remark thet Diamond Dick and the gal air a team, an' don't ye furgit it."

"You've struck ther ace there, me boy!" a third chipped in sagely.

Meanwhile, Darley and some of the men were congratulating Diamond Dick on his fortunate escape from the clutch of the savage-minded, reckless lynchers.

"Thank ye, boys," Diamond Dick modestly made his acknowledgements, but in a voice that had a lingering tremor of sadness in it. "I'm moughty glad ter hev yer good wishes, an' I won't furgit ye fur yer kind words; but I can't say I'm adzactly altogether satisfied with ther way things hev turned out. I don't like ter shoot a man 'f I kin help it; still, a feller don't like ter have a dirty charge slung at him, an' say nothin' in defense."

"That's square; a man's got ter be a man, an' no mistake," a miner observed, cheerfully. "Besides, I don't know as we'll miss them fellers much; they've been runnin' things a little too fresh here lately."

"You knows better about thet then I do; but thar's one thing ye kin settle yer mind on, boys. What them fellers charged me with war a clear, straight lie. Dora Carey is dead, that's a sure fact; but nothin' of me sent her down; an' I swear, by all ther stars in Heaven, thet I'd give ha'f o' my wealth ter git a crack et ther coyote as done ther dirty deed!"

The voice of Diamond Dick was low as he uttered these words, but the intense gleam in his brilliant eyes, the firm contraction of his brows, the stern set of his lips, all told how eager he was to revenge the mysterious murder of fair Dora Carey.

But the proprietor of the Gold Brick put in a word of warning.

"You were right enough in resisting an unlawful arrest, but you will have to be on your guard hereafter," he said. "If Crystal Chip ordered this act, you have made an enemy who will try every means in his power to make you pay for this night's work."

Diamond Dick uttered a laugh whose intonation was anything but pleasant to hear.

"Thet may be," he replied, significantly, "but you kin bet yer bottom bank dollar thet me'n this galoot, Crystal Chip, 'll have a talk about this affair—an' mebbe sumthin' more'n talk—you hear me cooin', my friend!"

But here the Faro Queen cried, anxiously. "Are you wounded, Diamond Dick? I see blood dropping from your finger tips."

"Not bad—I got a few scratches frum ther bullets, thet's all."

"Let me look at them," the beautiful girl insisted, gravely.

Diamond Dick threw off his coat, rolled up the sleeve of his shirt, and displayed a gash in his arm, near the shoulder, where a leaden pellet had plowed its way.

Carefully, gently, the Faro Queen bathed and bandaged the wound, assisted by the



daintily clad negro who presided over the liquid refreshments.

But during this operation most of the miners left the Gold Brick, the deadly affray which had taken place disinclining them for further play; and soon none remained save those who rightly belonged to the place, together with Diamond Dick, Cactus Blossom, and those who were silenced forever.

It was then that Diamond Dick suddenly observed, "By ther way, my Queen of Faro, what's become o' thet dagger?"

Annie Darley walked behind the bar, where she stooped and picked up the stiletto which she had thrown there during the fight.

Then, as the girl handed the weapon to Diamond Dick, there was an expression in her eyes which the man noticed at once.

"This is a peculiar sort 'o weepoon, ain't it?" Diamond Dick remarked, gazing reflectively at the keen-pointed blade. "I hev seed these kind o' things in Mexico among ther greasers, but yer don't often meet them on ther American border. Did you ever see one afore, me Faro Queen?"

He eyed the girl keenly as he made the inquiry.

Annie Darley remained silent for a moment; then raising her queenly head, she answered, firmly, "I have."

"Where, when?" demanded Diamond Dick, eagerly.

"In Lightning Lode, to your first question; not later than three days ago, to your last," the Faro Queen replied, slowly.

"And who possessed it?"

The girl again remained silent, her face troubled, a look of indecision in her eyes.

"I will answer that question," Hank Darley put in. "We saw—I say we, because Annie and I saw it—not a weapon like that, but the same one, and it was in the possession of Crystal Chip."

"Crystal Chip!" the Man of Diamonds repeated, evidently startled. "Do you think that he could have done that foul deed?"

"I do not know—I can see no visible object for him to commit such a horrible crime," was the reply. "Dora Carey and he seemed to be on the best of terms, and Crystal Chip informed me at one time that he had been acquainted with the lady for a number of years."

"And what do you think about it, my Faro Queen?"

"I—I think—I do not know what to think!" the beautiful young woman answered, confusedly. "I can say only this; I have known Crystal Chip for only a few months; but during this time I have never discovered any dishonorable act in him. He has always been

pleasant in his speech to me, and gallant in compliments and actions."

"Then it wouldn't be natural ter think he done ther killin' o' ther lady," Diamond Dick remarked, decidedly, though in his dark, brilliant eyes there gleamed an expression which was in direct contradiction to his speech.

"But thar's one thing, sure," he continued; "I'm a-goin' ter hunt the murderer of thet woman down if it takes me ten years ter do it."

"And I sincerely hope you will succeed!" Hank Darley exclaimed, warmly.

But the Faro Queen said nothing, and Cactus Blossom, who, for a wonder, had held her tongue during this conversation, was watching her face with a curious, cautious look.

Nothing more of importance was brought out in the conversation, and finally Diamond Dick and Cactus Blossom took their leave.

But when once outside in the night air, Cactus Blossom said, quietly.

"Pard, ye want to keep your eyes on that Faro Queen. She knows more about this affair of the murdered Dora Carey than she let out to-night."

And Diamond Dick answered, laconically: "I know it."

## CHAPTER VII.

### STRUCK DOWN FROM BEHIND.

It was a week after the arrival of Diamond Dick and his girl pard in Lightning Lode, and during that short interval of time the pallid-faced man and the fair-faced girl had become well acquainted with the inhabitants, and in fact had managed to become the favorites of many.

During these few days both Diamond Dick and Cactus Blossom had been on the alert, and had picked up here and there some slight clews, as favoring their secret designs.

No further attempt had been made in the name of Judge Lynch to put Diamond Dick in danger of his life; the prompt way in which he had maintained his rights, and the deadly manner of his resistance to an unlawful arrest, having evidently gained for him and his girl pard the respect of the rough miners, no less than the fear of the mysterious beings who were working for their ruin.

Diamond Dick and Crystal Chip had met, indeed, on the day following the fight in the Gold Brick gaming saloon, where the dark-haired man had now become a daily visitor; and certain explanations and significant expressions had passed between the two men so alike in face and form.



Crystal Chip, on this occasion, denied emphatically that he had given Jim Cardy and his men any such order as the leader of the lynchers had indicated.

His manner of speech was still haughty in the extreme, and he intimated, in a voice not to be mistaken, that he needed no help in any encounter where the chances were equal.

Jim Cardy being dead, there was no way of proving that Crystal Chip had had a hand in the scheme to arrest and hang Diamond Dick; and the man from Gunnison therefore realized that he was checkmated on that move to a certain degree.

But still he was not altogether satisfied on this point, and, cunningly shifting the conversation, directed the talk once more to the murder of Dora Carey.

Crystal Chip listened to him coldly, but as Diamond Dick became warmer in his speech, and finally produced the dagger which had slain the woman, the bronze-haired man of crystal fame started violently at sight of the stiletto.

"Was Dora Carey slain by that weapon?" he exclaimed, in evident astonishment.

"That's the very identical weepen I drew from ther heart o' ther woman, whar ther coyote as killed her left it," Diamond Dick answered, firmly.

Crystal Chip took the weapon in his hands, and for some time examined it curiously, without speaking.

As this interview was taking place in the Gold Brick, Mr. Darley, the Faro Queen, and Cactus Blossom were present, and one and all were watching the handsome, crystal-bedizened man's face with various emotions, expressed upon their own features.

"Well, this is a strange affair," Crystal Chip at last remarked, slowly, as he handed back the stiletto. "I never expected to see that weapon in this part of the country."

"Eh! what?" Diamond Dick cried.

"That's what I said, and what I mean is that the weapon you hold is the exact counterpart of one which I possess," continued the other."

"An' you have a weepen like this?" Diamond Dick asked in astonishment.

"Here it is. You can judge yourself how it compares with the blade in your hand."

And as he spoke Crystal Chip produced from his breast pocket a dagger so similar in size, shape, and embellishment to the one Diamond Dick held, that the two weapons looked as if they had been both cast in the same mold.

Diamond Dick gazed upon the companion weapon with a look of stupefaction; the Faro Queen gave a sigh of relief, and Darley a snort of satisfaction.

It was only Cactus Blossom who looked doubtfully upon the face of Crystal Chip.

Diamond Dick felt a sensation as if the ground was slipping from under his feet.

He had been building high hopes on tracing down the ownership of the stiletto to Crystal Chip, but now, even as he was almost sure of victory, his bronzed-haired double had produced evidence which crushed his theory and suspicions like an egg shell.

"That stiletto is part of an inheritance left me some years ago," Crystal Chip went on, calmly. "I have cherished it more as a specimen of art than as a deadly weapon, for the arabesque engraving upon the silver hilt is something wonderful."

"It air so—an' no mistake," Diamond Dick affirmed, somewhat crestfallen, "but I'd give a pile ter know who this steel belonged to."

Crystal Chip smiled scornfully, a strange, mocking light coming into his eyes.

"I can tell you that," he said, "and tell you without reward. The dagger you hold belonged to Dora Carey."

"To ther murdered lady? nonsense!"

"Don't let any unbelief muddle your mind," Crystal Chip continued, coldly. "I know what I am saying. These two stilettos belonged to the brother of Dora Carey, an amateur antiquarian. On his death he willed me a lot of his curiosities, among which was the dagger I have shown you; the other one descended to the lady. She prized it highly as a gift from her dead brother, for he had assured us that these two weapons were of very ancient make and the only ones of their class in existence; but Dora Carey's relic had been misplaced or stolen from her some time ago."

"Then, accordin' ter yer story, the feller as killed her got thet steel from her and plunged it into her heart."

"It looks like it; but what object he or they had in murdering the lady I cannot imagine, for she was kind in her way, generous with her wealth, and in everything worthy of respect. I have heard a description of the place where Miss Carey's body was found by you, and I shall visit it at once. If the slightest clew will lead me on, I swear to follow it until I run down the one who committed the terrible crime!"

"An' I swear ther same!" Diamond Dick cried, in a tone which sent an icy chill through the hearts of all who heard.

At this they had parted, Crystal Chip leaving the town with the firmly avowed intention of running down the murderer or murderers of his lady friend, and Diamond Dick to study out some new theory of the crime.

During the next six days Crystal Chip had remained away, while Diamond Dick kept



asking himself day after day, "Has thet feller struck a clew?"

"On the night of the seventh day, however, Diamond Dick had dropped into the Gold Brick to await the arrival of Cactus Blossom, who had gone out during the afternoon for some purpose which she kept a secret.

But hour after hour passed, and the girl did not reappear, until finally Diamond Dick's anxiety for the girl deepened into positive alarm.

Bidding good-night to the Faro Queen, he passed out into the street, assuring himself first that his revolvers were in good condition and handy to the grasp.

He walked rapidly up and down the street, peeping into dark corners and out of the way places, entered the saloons and other places of amusements, and made inquiries of such persons as were abroad, but with no success.

No one remembered having seen Cactus Blossom that evening.

"Wall, I'm darned 'f that ain't curious!" Diamond Dick soliloquized. "Cactus must hev struck some lead that's kept her busy; or else some one's knocked her out sumwhere."

He paused on the dark street and glanced about keenly, but no signs of his girl pard rewarded his sight.

As a last resort he entered the "Tip-Top Star," the dancing hall of Lightning Lode.

A wretched band of music was in full blast, and a waltz in progress—rough-bearded miners and frail women going round and round in a "bear-hug" whirl.

But even here the search of Diamond Dick was useless.

Cactus Blossom had not been in the rude dancing hall that night; and no inquiries could elicit any information of her present whereabouts.

After a short time Diamond Dick returned to the Gold Brick.

"Was my pard here since I bin gone?" he inquired of the Faro Queen.

"Not to-night, Diamond Dick" the card queen answered, with a pleasant smile.

Annie Darley nowadays always took pleasure in talking with Diamond Dick, for it must be confessed that the pale-faced, black-ringed man from Gunnison had already woven a spell over her heart which was beyond her power to crush, even had she so wished.

"Wall, I can't make out what's become o' ther girl," Diamond Dick remarked, dubiously. "She war to meet me here at eight o'clock, an' it's 'way arter twelve now."

"Run off with another fellow, perhaps," the Faro Queen suggested, in a quiet, careless manner. "Or maybe shifted into another sphere as did poor Dora Carey. By the way,

have you discovered any clew to the fiend who killed the beautiful young creature?"

"Not sartin'; but I'm gittin' thar!" Diamond Dick replied, significantly.

The Faro Queen looked at him curiously.

"I was right glad that it was not Crystal Chip's dagger which killed poor Miss Carey," she said, after a pause. "That night you showed us the weapon, and, as I then believed, as I recognized it, I was horror-stricken to imagine such a horrible crime of that dashing, handsome fellow."

Diamond Dick smiled grimly.

"It did look kind o' bad fur him, then, did it not?" he observed, calmly.

"But you don't still suspect him of having a hand in the murder, do you?" the Faro Queen inquired, with a keen glance.

"Not fur a moment, me Queen o' Faro," Diamond Dick remarked, with a curious, grim look upon his features. "I'm jest as dead sartin', sure's I'm alive, thet Crystal Chip didn't so much as raise a finger agin thet lady—let alone a dagger."

"Oh, I am so pleased to hear you say that! I have always admired Crystal Chip as an honorable gentleman, incapable of any action so horrible as the murder of a woman."

"Wall, me Faro Queen, 'f it's enny pleasure to ye, I say it agin that Crystal Chip had nothin' ter do with thet affair—never even knew thet the woman war dead until—but never mind now what he didn't know. Cactus Blossom ain't showed up, an' I reckon it mought be as you remarked awhile ago, she may hev given me ther shake, an' picked up another pard. So, I'll jiss say good by to yer once more, an' this time fur good." And with a pleasant smile, Diamond Dick bowed and left the Faro Queen to her game.

Most of the miners had retired for the night, and the street was completely deserted, as the black-ringed man wended his way to the cabin which he had pre-empted for a home.

A short time before he came in sight of the hue, his attention was attracted by a slight-built form lying to one side near a cabin, and he also heard a groan of pain.

Some peculiarity in the prostrate form struck Crystal Chip as being familiar, and he sprang to the side of the prostrate shape.

"Air thet you, Cactus Blossom?" he inquired, anxiously.

A pitiful exclamation of pain was the only answer.

Bending his eyes closer to the face of the prostrate being, the bronze-hued man saw that it was not his girl pard, but a slightly formed man dressed as a miner.

At the same instant he made this discovery, a sound in his rear—slight rustling, a faint footfall, attracted his attention; but before he



could turn round a swift, terrible blow descended upon his head, and he fell forward upon his face unconscious or dead.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN THE CIRCLE OF THE SALAMANDERS.

It is night in the heart of a great, dark forest of huge pines of firs and of oaks, whose towering tops are lost in gloom, and within whose gigantic forms time has recorded years of age; a forest that circled the peak of Lightning Lode like a belt; where tangled creepers grow, thick matted bushes bar the footsteps of man, vines of poison ivy and of oak spawn their noxious dew, and bunches of Spanish moss hang from the arched limbs like ghostly veils; a forest where a breath of wind hardly rustles the leaves, where the purring of the panther is heard like the sobs of a lost child, and where the growl of the grizzly and the roar of the fierce puma are the only sounds of life.

Here, in the midst of these giant trunks, in the dead of night, and in a little glade formed by nature's hand, a solemn scene is being acted.

The stars that look down into this opening are blurred from sight by the glare of a fire which lights the little glade with weird, flickering light.

And where the fire casts its brightest light, in the center of the glade, it falls upon and illuminates every detail of the terrible drama about to be enacted.

In the middle of the forest opening stand a number of beings, disguised from head to foot in loose garments, white as hue, and with faces cowed with masks representing a human face, likewise ghastly in hue.

In their midst, bound firmly to the trunk of a strong sapling, is a man whose pale face is streaked with blood, the outflow of a cowardly blow, but whose brilliant eyes are flashing glances of scorn and defiance into the motionless features of the masked men.

Each of the white-clad beings holds in hand, ready for use, a revolver, upon the glittering barrels of which the fire-flashes play with a savage gleam.

And slightly in advance of the rest stands one who is evidently the leader of the band.

But, surrounded as he is by merciless enemies, bound almost beyond motion, the eyes of the captive return the fierce looks of the masked men with unflinching defiance, and not a trace of fear is upon his handsome face.

With a smile upon his lips, he looks death in the face, for he is Diamond Dick, and the masked men are the road agents, led by Salamander Sol.

At last the disguised chief speaks, in a low, solemn voice:

"Diamond Dick," he says, exultantly, "we have you at last in our deadly circle, from which no enemy ever escapes with life."

"Ye've got me sure enuff, Salamander Sol," the dauntless captive retorts, "but ye were afraid ter face me when armed, and caught me only by a cowardly blow, struck from behind."

The masked chief laughed sternly.

"What would you have?" he cried, mockingly. "Look upon us as we stand about you, and count our numbers. A week ago we answered 'here!' to twenty-four names—to-night we reply to only thirteen. Where are the others gone?"

Diamond Dick made no reply, for well he knew what had thus more than halved the number of the Salamander band.

"Listen to my words, Diamond Dick, for they are to be the last you will ever hear," the masked chief continued, slowly. "About a week ago you entered a small ravine not far from here, where you found the body of a woman who had been killed not an hour before."

"That woman was Dora Carey, and, Diamond Dick, it was my hand that drove that dagger into her heart!"

"Ah, that announcement surprises you, eh? Well, hark well to my words, and I will relate her story to you."

"Some years ago, how many is not material, I lived to the east of here in a large city. My life was a bright one; I knew not the meaning of crime, my position in business was influential; immense sums of money passed through my hands."

"About a—well, a short time ago, I became acquainted with Dora Carey, and not long after her beauty, wit, and winning grace brought me to her feet."

"And then and there, mad with the wiles of her bewitching beauty, I declared my love, and was accepted by her with a warmth that drove me into a heaven of joy."

"But she had been reared in luxury, and my position in business, while it was high, as the word goes, did not bring me the revenue necessary to support her in the manner to which she had been accustomed."

"But after a season of love-making, in which I laid bare my situation of the present, and my hopes of the future, she, Dora Carey, threw out hints and suggestions of how I could improve my financial standing, and finally defined a plan which horrified me, but which, in the end, influenced by her loving smiles and arguments, gained a hold upon me that I could never shake off."

"Her plan was that I should rob the—rob



my employers of a sum of money on which we could live for the rest of our lives in luxury and ease, and I did it.

"It was a n easy matter for me to do, but unfortunately I was caught in the act by one of my employers and I killed him, and when the murder and the loss of the money were discovered I directed the search for the criminal in a direction which cleared me of anything like suspicion.

"In due course of time Dora Carey and I were married. I resigned my position, and travelled with my wife on a quiet honeymoon.

"But I soon discovered that the woman I had married was not the pure, loving being I had imagined her. Instead, she was designing, cruel, selfish; and two months after our marriage she deserted me for another, and I dared make no move, for she held in her possession proofs of my crime, and most of the money I had stolen.

"After she had fled from me, I drifted out here, and the wild, border life of the West delighted me. I threw myself into it, body and soul.

"I became known to a lot of men, good fellows, and bold, and we formed the circle of the Salamander league; our earnings in these disguises have been immense, for our order extends into prominent places, and we receive full information when to strike and where.

"You may say that you never heard of us before the other night, and our words would be true, for our disguises are varied and many.

"But now to the point.

"Four weeks ago Dora Carey came to Lightning Lode and sought me out.

"She represented herself as penitent for her past career, and prayed with tears in her beautiful eyes and all the blandishments of her fascinating form and face to be taken back into my affections.

"But I laughed at her; scorned her proffered love, and laid before her in plain language a sketch of my outlaw life, into which she had driven me with her temptations, and then left me to carry my burden alone.

"I maddened her; aroused all the latent fury of her nature and she swore that she would place me behind the iron bars of the jail, if she died for it.

"But I treated her threats with contempt until I found out that she was corresponding with the authorities to deliver me into their hands.

"This sealed her fate.

"A decoy letter supposed to have come from a noted detective, led her to the ravine where you found her body.

"And there I killed her—ay, took her life with as little regret as if I had slain a rabid dog.

"But before we could dispose of the body you and your pard came upon the scene and obtained a knowledge of the crime.

"You know what happened afterward.

"We came down upon you that night, not with the intention of killing you as our threats implied, but to scare you away from the city of Lightning Lode.

"But you would not have it so, and your resistance cost four of the Salamanders their lives.

"The night of your arrival at Lightning Lode we had our plans arranged for your reception.

"But we failed again and seven of our clan fell before your deadly weapons.

"This was the last stroke which rent all feelings of mercy for you into shreds; a meeting was held, a vote cast, and you were unanimously condemned to die.

"That was your sentence, and here is the place where it is to be executed—not by hand or weapons of ours, but by the fangs of the wild animals who make this forest their home. Here you shall remain, bound, gagged and unarmed, until the fierce beasts drink your blood and rend you limb from limb.

"Such, Diamond Dick, is to be your fate. You have seen fit to investigate an event which concerned you not the least; you pitted your single strength against the power of the Salamander Circle; your evil nature—your deadly bullets cut us down man after man; but your work in life is over.

"And I am done—I have said what I wished."

As calmly as though reading a story aloud the outlaw-chief had spoken, without an accent of anger in his voice; plainly, simply he had related the history of the part of his life, and the terrible deeds of murder and robbery which found eventful epochs in it.

And Diamond Dick, despite his bold bearing and fearless eyes, felt a sensation in his heart that was almost akin to despair; for he realized that he was doomed to a death horrible to contemplate even, and still more awful to pass through.

But his features never flinched, and he returned the glance of the masked chief with a look of real contempt.

"You have played yer game well, Salamander Sol," the captive said, slowly, "but ye've bucked agin the wrong man when you tackled me. You have slung out yer story in a sing-song style, but ye didn't sing it all. An' jest remember what I say ter ye now, the time will come when ye'll hev ter give us ther chorus—ay! and the hour is nearer than you know."

"Well, let it be so," Salamander Sol remarked, coldly. "When my turn comes to face death you will find me there."



"But who ther devil air you ennyway, Salamander Sol? An' why hev ye bin chasing me around so much?" Diamond Dick demanded.

"Who I am does not matter; even my own men do not know that," Salamander Sol replied, quickly. "But our enmity to you was reasonable enough. You are a detective; you were sent into this country to hunt down a man who happens to be one of our band. You know more of the murder of Dora Carey than we wished, and you had openly avowed the fact that you would investigate the deed, and hunt down the murderer. You were playing against the Salamanders of Saddle Range with all your faculties of invention and power, and the blood of eleven men called aloud for vengeance upon you."

"Oh! as fur thet, I reckon ther men brought death on themselves," Diamond Dick replied, with a sneer. "Ye must a sized me up fur a way down critter ter let a lot o' no 'count fellers drag me whar they like."

"They were obeying orders; they were not merely human beings, but agents of the Salamander Circle."

"I see! It was not man agin man; it was man agin moles."

"Call it what you wish, Diamond Dick, but even moles have teeth, and you shall feel them."

"How? In ther back o' ther head when I ain't lookin'?"

The Salamander chief made no answer, but gave a signal to his men, a few of whom advanced with strips of cloth to gag the voice of the bediamonded captive man.

But before this could be accomplished Diamond Dick cried out, fiercely:

"Ye dogs!—coyotes! and you, ye leading cur! I know ye all. Tie me fast, if you wish, and let the wild beasts rend me piece by piece; but, living or dead, I swear, by the God above us, that I shall follow you in form or spirit! Ay, hunt you down as merciless as a tiger in the jungles hunts its victim, and place you each and all where you belong—on the gal-lows."

Thus far they allowed him to speak, but then the gag was thrust fiercely into his mouth, his head forced back and firmly lashed to the trunk of the sapling; and thus, unarmed, helpless, even denied speech, the captive was left to his horrible fate—either to die of starvation or be devoured by the savage animals who roamed about the forest.

Their captive thoroughly secured, the masked men tramped out the fire, and at a sharp order they left the glade, no one uttering a word, and each one moving with the soundlessness of a phantom.

Salamander Sol only said a few parting words to the bound captive.

"Diamond Dick, you came here to arrest Christopher Conover," he whispered into the ear of the bound man, "but no living creature shall ever bring him within the grasp of the law."

Then, with a fierce glance through the loopholes of his mask, the Salamander chief flitted away into the darkness, and Diamond Dick was left to his fate.

After a time, assured that he was alone, he exerted all his Herculean strength as far as he was enabled to stretch or break his bonds.

But the effort was useless. He had been fastened to the sapling in a manner which resisted any power he was enabled to exert, and he finally desisted in despair.

Then he noticed that the gray streaks of daybreak were struggling with the twinkling light of the stars.

At the same instant he saw the bushes in front of him parted, while a form dressed in the disguise of a Salamander advanced cautiously toward him, crouching low down, and making no sound audible to the ear.

The eyes of the masked being were fixed upon the face of Diamond Dick with a curious look, and in its hand was the gleaming blade of a long knife.

Then a horrible conviction flashed into the mind of Diamond Dick.

This masked being had been secretly sent back by Salamander Sol to make his death a certainty.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CACTUS BLOSSOM PLAYS HER GAME.

But while our hero, the dauntless Diamond Dick, was in this terribly perilous position, where was Cactus Blossom?

It will be remembered that she was a witness to the interview between her pard and his double the day following the one on which the fight had taken place in the Gold Brick gaming saloon.

When Crystal Chip left the saloon, with the sternly avowed purpose of hunting down the murder of Dora Carey, the girl had remarked to her pard:

"Well, Diamond Dick, what do you think of this dagger racket?"

"I'm derned 'f I know, Cactus Blossom; I'm all knocked in the head about it," Diamond Dick had replied in evident disgust. "It warn't Crystal Chip's dagger as killed ther woman, thet's sure."

"Not his weapon, but for all that it might have been his hand which drove the blade you



hold into the heart of the beautiful body we found," Cactus Blossom remarked, coolly.

"What reason or suspicion have you to believe him capable of such an act?" the Faro Queen, who was present, inquired quickly.

"Wall, it was just this. Crystal Chip was too ready, in my estimation, in producing evidence that this dagger was not his, and in relating a yarn that seemed to throw him way out of the affair. But I'll bet the bottom leather of my boots that he knows something of the affair, I don't say that he struck the blow, but that I suspect him of it."

"Oh, ye'r 'way off ther trail, my gal," Diamond Dick had cried, decidedly. "I war suspectin' Crystal Chip, too, when I heard this dagger war his; but he proved that it warn't, an' ther story he told about the two weepens seemed straight to me."

Cactus Blossom smiled in a peculiar way.

"You may be right, pard," she said, calmly, "and I will say no more about it just now; only, the subject was on my mind, and I generally let out what I'm thinking of."

"Bet yer life ye do thet, Cactus Blossom," the man of diamonds had observed, with a significant laugh.

"But you must be more cautious in throwing out such hints in this town," the Faro Queen rather angrily interposed again. "No such man as Crystal Chip would listen to such a charge as you make without punishing you swiftly and terribly."

Cactus Blossom drew her form haughtily erect, and her big eyes gazed defiantly upon the face of beautiful Faro Queen.

"I say what I think, and I generally mean what I say," the fair-faced girl retorted, sharply. "And if my talking don't suit my hearers, I've got something that will back my words and maybe please them better." She significantly tapped the revolver in her belt.

The face of the Faro Queen flushed hotly, and she bit her lips to keep back an angry retort.

For some unknown cause the two women did not admire each other, and if the truth be told, Annie Darley was jealous of the intimacy existing between the girl pard and her handsome companion.

There seemed a feeling of the same order with Cactus Blossom, who at least affected to look with decided disfavor upon the good fellowship, and admiration with which her pard sought the presence of the Faro Queen.

But Diamond Dick, seeing the looks passing between the two, put in hastily:

"Well, me Cactus Blossom, let us hunt up some lonely spot whar we kin think this curis thing over." And he accordingly led the way from the gaming den.

For the next week, as I have related, the

girl and her handsome pard had scouted about the town of Lightning Lode and its neighborhood, listening here and there, trailing like sleuth-hounds on suspicious clews, and alert as weazles to catch any indication that would carry forward their plans.

On the afternoon of the day when Diamond Dick was captured by the Salamanders, Cactus Blossom was lying among the underbrush of the forest, resting her weary form after a long tramp, when suddenly a quick, shrill whistle rang on her ear.

A few moments after, faint but distinct, an answering signal came from the direction of the town.

Then the footsteps of a man fell upon the keen ears of the girl, and, parting the underbrush cautiously, she bent her piercing eyes upon the invader of her solitude.

"Ah!" she muttered to herself, a satisfied light in her eyes, "it is Crystal Chip."

It was none other than the bronze-haired man of crystal fame, and he halted not five paces from where the girl lay concealed. Then once more the peculiar whistle came from his lips.

This time it was answered much nearer, and a few moments later a slight-built man, of quick, lithe motion and crafty-looking face, parted the bushes and advanced toward Crystal Chip.

"Hello, chief, when did ye git back?" the man said, familiarly. "The boys kind o' thought ye'd gone under, as we didn't hear from you fur so long."

"Oh, I'm alive yet, and I haven't been idle," Crystal Chip answered, quickly. "I've been up near Denver, Bob, and I tell you I've been working up some bonanza schemes."

"Glad to hear ye say it, cap; 'cause we've had it easy here of late."

"Well, you will have enough to do pretty soon. I've got some big schemes on hand. Are all the boys in?"

"I reckon they air all around town, somewhere, cap'n."

"That's well, Bob, and I want you to give them all notice to come to the meeting place in the forest, and to get there as soon as possible."

"All right, Crystal, I'll let them know. Do ye want all hands?"

"Every one that you can give the order to. Tell them to get to the meeting place inside of an hour; we have important work to do, and it must be done at once, or we are lost."

"Why, what's up?" the man inquired, in surprise.

"Well, here's the whole business in a nutshell. While up at Denver I learned that the Salamanders have been shadowed by one of the cutest detectives in the business, and that



the most damning proofs of our work have been sent into the hands of the authorities by this police spy. If we wish to exist, we must get this fellow out of the way, and that is what I want the men for—to lay out some plan to get rid of this hound of the law."

"The devil!" exclaimed Bob. "But look here, Crystal, air this Diamond Dick and the celebrated John Sherry, of Denver, one an' the same, as you once kinder give it out to the Salamanders?"

"Hardly; that was a bluff. But Diamond Dick is the Denver detective's spy—his advance courier, to so speak. I've learned that much for a certainty. And, in addition to smashing our Salamander organization, this Diamond Dick—curse him—has an individual object in running me—Chris Conover, alias Crystal Chip—down to the gallows' foot on his own account."

"Hello!" cried the subordinate outlaw. "No wonder you want the chap out of the way, an' without no delay nuther."

"I should say not," moodily.

"But what air he got agin you personally, cap? I don't exactly understand."

"Bob," said Crystal Chip, after a reflective pause, "you are about the only one of our Salamander crew that I have ever confided much to of my personal history."

"Thet you hev, cap; an' I'm much obleeged, you bet. You'll never regret trustin' me, cap."

"I know that. Listen to me, then. In the first place Diamond Dick and I had a private difficulty in another territory long ago. Never mind the cause. But it was after that, that in view of my resembling him so much in form and features, the idea occurred to me of carrying out the resemblance to a yet greater extent by copying him in his style of dress and ornamentation, as you have remarked, for the purpose of complicating matters, and perhaps even mixing up his personality—of which he is proud as Lucifer—with whatever slack business I might thereafter be engaged in. See?"

"Don't I?" admiringly. "A mighty shrewd dodge, too, cap!"

"That for one thing. This for another, and the worst of all, that Diamond Dick knows me as the murderer of Dora Carey. And, howsoever I may glaze the thing over, he doubtless knows, or nearly knows her to have been my wronged and injured wife, Dora Conover; and probably also suspecting the real truth—that I was prompted to get rid of her to satisfy the jealousy of the Faro Queen."

"Whew!" exclaimed the minor villain; "and she's now gone back on you, too, charmed, like enough, by the softer pale mug an' real diamonds and assumed rough style of Diamond Dick hisself?"

Crystal Chip ground his teeth and stamped his foot in a manner that was a sufficient answer in the affirmative.

"But, look here, boss," continued the other, "thar's one thing I can't adzactly understand?"

"What's that?" surlily.

"Ef this galoot's the real, genuine, original Jacobs Di'mond Dick what hez made sich a name for hisself fur an' wide, what's become o' the little boy, pard—Bertie, ez they called him, an' ez was b'lieved to be his son—the snap shot little golden-haired chap—that allers traveled with him, an' was growin' skeercely less famous than Di'mond hisself?"

"Humph! That's as much of a mystery to me as you. It's a girl pard, now, it seems; an' she seems as dead a shot as the boy, for that matter."

"You're right, Crystal," rejoined Bob, sternly. "Not a doubt of it; the sooner we put both John Sherry and Diamond Dick under ground the better it will be for us."

"No more, then, Bob!" continued Crystal Chip. "So get away with you, and hurry up the boys all you can. I will leave you now and proceed to the place of meeting."

"All right, cap! count on me."

The pair separated, the man, Bob, plunging into the bushes, and moving rapidly toward Lightning Lode.

And then, with stern set features, a curious flash of satisfaction gleaming in her eye, a revolver gripped fast in her hand, Cactus Blossom leaped to her feet, and, like a panther on the scent, she followed Crystal Chip.

"He spoke of the Salamanders," the girl muttered, "and I believe, by the living light above us, that Crystal Chip sometimes calls himself Salamander Sol."

For nearly an hour she kept the rustler's form in sight, but at the end of this time the man halted in an open glade, and the girl realized that the place of meeting had been reached at last.

With the utmost caution she drew herself into a thicket of bushes on the edge of the glade, from where she could see and hear all that passed.

It was not long after their arrival when the men from Lightning Lode appeared, all eager to hear the news, of which the man Bob had given them an inkling.

When they had all put in an appearance, Crystal Chip called them to order, and related to them much of what he had already said to Bob.

A plan of action was soon arranged, and how successfully it was carried out we know, for these men whom Crystal Chip addressed were none others than the Salamanders of Saddle Range, and he was their leader.

But before disbanding, after all the details



of Diamond Dick's fate had been agreed upon, the leader of the Salamanders drew a letter from his pocket, and, calling Bob to one side, spoke with him in a low tone.

But Cactus Blossom, who had been a keen observer of all that passed, heard the closing sentence of his orders. It was as follows:

"You will find a horse in the usual place, so make all the haste you can, and let no one but him whose name is upon the envelope see that letter."

"All right, cap; you can trust me."

And, shoving the missive into the bosom of his shirt, Bob plunged into the forest, while shortly after the rest of the men dispersed.

Then a wild desire to read the contents of the letter in Bob's possession seized upon Cactus Blossom.

Quick as a flash she sprang from her concealment, and followed the messenger of the Salamander chief.

But the man had obtained a long start, and it was some time before the girl caught sight of his figure.

Finally, Bob was drawing from a hollow log his white Salamander disguise, when Cactus Blossom almost stumbled over him.

Quick as thought a revolver flashed in the hand of the Salamander, as he heard the approaching footsteps, but Cactus Blossom sprang behind a tree just in time to escape the shot.

Then one of her revolvers was leveled at the head of the Salamander, and her voice rang out, shrill as a bell:

"Drop that pistol, and do it quick!"

"Wall, what do ye want with me?" Bob inquired, seeking meanwhile to conceal the white disguise which betrayed his connection with the road agents of the Saddle Range.

"I want the letter that Crystal Chip gave you an hour ago," Cactus Blossom said, sternly.

A wild light flashed into the eyes of the man.

"A letter?" he gasped. "I've got no letter."

"I know a heap sight better; I heard all that passed in your meeting—your Salamander Circle, as you call it—and saw your chief hand you the envelope. And I want it."

"Then take it if you can!"

And with a snarl of rage, Bob leveled his revolver, and fired.

But Cactus Blossom was on the watch, and simultaneously her weapon rang out as the man fired.

The Salamander uttered a low cry, and fell forward upon his face, a bullet in his brain—in the forehead, just between the eyes!

The next instant Cactus Blossom was searching the motionless form, and she soon held the letter in her hand.

The superscription of the missive read: "Seth Brownson, Gunnison."

And in one corner of the envelope was written: "Important. S. S."

Tearing open the envelope, Cactus Blossom drew out the paper it contained, and read the following:

"SETH:—You can go ahead now with your plan. Dora Carey is dead, and the only man who knows anything about us will be put out of the way to-night. I mean, of course, Diamond Dick, the Denver detective's sleuth-hound in this big game. Make claim to the girl's estate in my name, and I will furnish you, in a few days, with all the necessary documents which will prove me the heir, and help you in the scheme. I have been up to Denver, and have made arrangements with the authorities to hand over the men of the Salamander League, of which I am the apparent head, and everything is in the right shape to go ahead on. I want to get to Chicago as soon as possible after delivering up the Salamanders, and get a grip on the girl's property. So I will make it a point to see you day after tomorrow, and deliver to you all the details necessary to work our scheme to a successful end. I remain, Seth, truly yours,

"C. CONOVER (Salamander Sol.)"

Cactus Blossom uttered a cry of satisfaction, as her eyes glanced upon the signature.

"So we have you at last, Crystal Chip, Salamander Sol, or whatever you choose to call yourself!" she exclaimed. "You have played your game under the imitation character of a man fifty times your superior, but you have played your last card, and it's our turn now!"

Then, securing the letter about her person, she drew forth the disguise of the Salamander, and was quickly arrayed in the white garments. In this garb she was a witness to all that passed between the Salamanders and Diamond Dick.

And, of course, it was the girl whom the captive saw advancing, knife in hand, not with the design of taking his life, as he had imagined, but to free him from his bonds.

Cactus Blossom gave a low laugh, as she saw the look of astonishment upon her pard's face, when the raw-hides which bound him were cast off.

"I've been near you right along, pard," she cried, gleefully.

"Eh! is it you, my dearie?" Diamond Dick cried.

"Right from the ground up! and I ain't been laying around doing nothing either. Just read this letter."

Diamond Dick read it through carefully, and his eyes blazed with light.

"Wal, I think we will close in; this letter is



positive proof that Crystal Chip is the man we want."

"Wal, I should remark."

"All right then; to-day we wind up this affair. Meantime I want you to go down to the ravine where we found the body of Dora Carey. You will find John Sherry and his men there; guide them here and I will meet you; make the best time you can, and give this note to the detective."

"All right, pard," and after a few more instructions, Cactus Blossom hurried away on her mission, while Diamond Dick disappeared within the forest.

## CHAPTER X.

### CONCLUSION.

The meetings between John Sherry, the Denver detective, with his posse of assistants, and Diamond Dick, which was brought about, under Cactus Blossom's clever guidance, about noon of that day in a spot of the forested wilderness, about midway between Lightning Lode and the secret rendezvous of the Salamander gang, was cordial and satisfactory in the extreme, as we may well imagine.

Sherry now expedited his orders, and the entire party, which numbered about a dozen in all, including Diamond Dick and Cactus Blossom, forthwith set out through the forest, under the girl's guidance, to effect the surprise of the miscreants at their rendezvous.

The expedition was successful.

In less than an hour the glade was completely surrounded by the posse with the utmost secrecy, and not long after the entire Salamander gang, including their leader and Brownson, had gathered at the spot, apparently without so much as a suspicion of the steely net that was being closed around them with the relentlessness of doom.

Fortunately for the captors, the Salamanders were there in much greater force than had been anticipated, and it was subsequently learned that members from the various ramifications of the nefarious band, far and near, had been apprised to attend the gathering by Crystal Chip, with the express intention of ultimately betraying them to the authorities in a solid body, and thus lessening the chance of his falling a victim to the personal revenge of one or another of them, or their friends, after securing his own dastard safety in flight.

There were fully thirty of them altogether, and, with the exception of their leader himself and the foxy lawyer from Gunnison, who were undisguised, all were duly white robed and masked after the regulation manner characteristic of their organization.

As the detective and his assistants com-

pleted their silent and secret cordon around the glade, the Salamander leader was just on the point of making his crew what seemed to be intended as a speech at temporary parting.

Simultaneously the besieging force disclosed themselves with an appalling yell, and with cocked weapons leveled, the astounded Salamanders found themselves hopelessly surrounded, and with the "drop" on them almost before they could realize it.

Two-thirds of the rank and file, including Brownson, who at once began to whine, confess, and beg for mercy all in the same breath, like a cornered hyena endowed with speech, were secured before they could recover from their panic.

Others, flying or offering savage resistance, were shot down without mercy.

But Crystal Chip, foaming at the mouth with rage and disappointment, stood furiously at bay at the head of a desperate handful of his remaining bravos, while these successes were being rapidly enacted.

"Death to you now, anyway, Diamond Dick!" vociferated the Salamander leader, bringing his leveled revolver to bear like a flash of light full at our hero's broad breast. "Dead-alive ye may be, and thus far with a charmed life, but this time——"

But here there was an interposing crack from Cactus Blossom's leveled revolver, and the weapon flew out of his hand, broken at the butt by the girl's lightning snap-shot, and discharging itself harmlessly in the air.

Simultaneously Crystal Chip was sent back staggering by a blow in the throat from Diamond Dick's sledge-hammer fist, while Jack Sherry, darting forward, snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

At the same moment, however, the giant Jeff Rodman was rushing upon the girl, a huge knife in his hand, murder in his eyes, when crack! her unerring shooting-iron spoke again, and he was on his back, a bullet in his brain.

"Observe that shot, Crystal Chip!" called out the girl, mockingly. "You were wondering, not so long ago, what had become of the boy, Bertie. But take note of that shot, I say, and tell me if there isn't something of the boy's old time peculiar style of marksmanship in it."

The defeated leader, thunderstruck, gazed first at his slain lieutenant, neatly bored in the forehead, exactly between the eyes, and then at the girl, in whose wild, free smile there was now something strangely familiar.

"Devils and fiends!" he hoarsely gasped; "why didn't I suspect it from the first? And yet, girl so fair of face, so laughing of eye, can it be possible that you are——"



"Bertie—the Bertie of old, and don't you furgit it, Mr. Imitation Diamonds!" sang out the heretofore Cactus Blossom, with her mocking laugh, in which there was no longer any mystification for the baffled desperado chief, for John Sherry, detective or for any one else. "Only that, and nothing more, Mr. Crystal Chip, murderer of your poor wife, Dora Carey, and heaven only knows how many others—Mr. Crystal Chip, alias Salamander Sol, alias Christopher Conover, and what not! And I say, old man, don't you feel already a little hempy about the throat?"

But Bertie, otherwise Cactus Blossom, was a little too previous, after all; inasmuch as the villainous Crystal Chip was destined to cheat the hangman's noose, even at last, though at the expense of even a more dreadful fate.

At this juncture there was a pandemonium of shouts and yells, and a mob of savage, reckless men, with a sparse sprinkling of the gentler sex, appeared upon the scene.

It was the mining population, out for its Sunday frolic—in fact, nearly the entire community of Lightning Lode, with Hank Darley, the gambler, and the fascinating Faro Queen, in their lead.

In a few minutes they had all mastered the particulars of the wholesale capture, and everything that it portended.

Then, as the whisky bottles passed from hand to hand in their maddening rounds, the surrounding wilds were the witnesses of such a savage picnic as had doubtless never desecrated the Sabbath solitudes of the Rocky Mountain wilderness before.

It was finally climaxed by a body of infuriated men making a sudden rush, overpowering the detective and his assistants with good-natured violence, seizing upon Crystal Chip and his lawyer pard, and bearing them off into the woods, like so many jaguars hurrying off with their prey. These two were soon suspended from the nearest tree, and then the mob returned and served the remainder of the Salamanders in like manner.

So it happened that, though no prisoners were taken back to Denver, the detective enterprise in behalf of law and order was none the less a signal and substantial success, so far as actual results were concerned, and we can depend upon it that, on the way thither, the return passage of Diamond Dick and Cactus Blossom through Gunnison was characterized by an ovation that was in striking contrast with their rough and misunderstood treatment there, such as was described in the opening of our story.

THE END.

The next number of Diamond Dick, Jr., will contain "Diamond Dick, Jr.'s Deputy," by W. B. Lawson.

## APPLAUSE.

I see in the latest issue of the Diamond Dick, Jr., that you would like to know how the boys like that weekly. I like it tip top, and would like to have the set, but am not able to afford it. I think it is the best weekly on record. LEO GREENWOOD.  
New York.

Thanks for your kind words.

I have read many weekly publications, but have found none to compare in interest with the Diamond Dick, Jr. I have taken it two years, and am more eager for it now than when I first began.  
Cowand, N. Y. LLOYD BATES COLLINS.

Your experience is one common to all the Weekly's readers. Thanks for your warm praise.

Acting upon your recent advertised request, we assume the liberty of writing to express our opinion of the Diamond Dick, Jr., Weekly. We consider them the most fascinating stories of Western life we have ever had the pleasure of reading. Kindly convey to the author of "Nick Carter" the request that he have Kid Kent appear again in the very near future. We would suggest that Diamond Dick, Jr., take a trip East, and that he get his hair cut (unless he contemplates becoming the manager of a football eleven) and wear civilian's clothes. We think he is much like the modest, dashing, peerless, unassuming hero of heroes—Frank Merriwell. It would be a grand thing to have him meet Frank. We send our best wishes.  
WILLIAM DAVIDSON.  
CHESTER A. DeGRAFFENREID.

Atlanta, Ga.

We thank you cordially for your good words for the Diamond Dick, Jr. Your suggestion has been handed to Mr. Lawson.

We have been readers of the Diamond Dick, Jr., Weekly from the first number to the present issue, and we all pronounce it the best and most interesting detective story we have ever read. The Diamond Dick, Jr., and Tip Top Weekly are the two leading libraries. We congratulate Mr. Lawson on his excellent skill as a writer, for he certainly is a splendid author. We admire Handsome Harry the most next to Diamond Dick, Jr. We think the old "Sarpint" irresistible, but we admire Diamond Dick, Sr., too. We hope Mr. Lawson will still let us hear from him, as we want to see how his claim pans out. No. 113 was just splendid. We wish the Diamond Dick, Jr., weekly long life and success.

THE BOYS OF CLARKSBURG, W. VA.

The boys of Clarksburg show a very keen and intelligent appreciation of the merits of the Diamond Dick, Jr. Mr. Lawson is much gratified by your kind words, and on his behalf and our own we thank you.

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